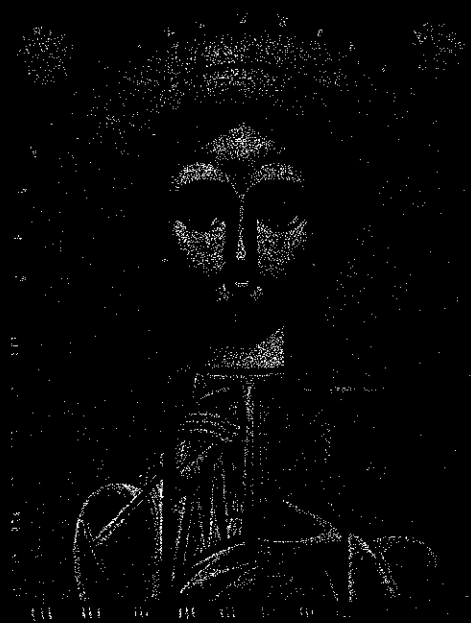


Proclaiming Christ Today

Orthodox-Evangelical Consultation

Alexandria, 10-15 July 1995

Edited by Huibert van Beek
and Georges Lemopoulos



World Council of Churches

SYNDESMOS

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World Council of Churches, Geneva
Syndesmos, Bialystok, Poland

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Foreword

Talks between representatives of Orthodox churches and people of evangelical commitment arose after the WCC's Canberra Assembly (1991) when it became apparent that Evangelicals and Orthodox shared concerns on a number of issues.

After the Assembly, key persons on both sides decided to explore the potential of an Orthodox-Evangelical discussion. Informal talks were then initiated. Evangelical leaders visited the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Istanbul and a first meeting between representatives of the Ecumenical Patriarchate and Evangelicals was convened in Stuttgart (1993).

Discussions and contacts continued, especially within the framework of the Central Committee of the WCC. At the Central Committee meeting in Johannesburg (1994), Orthodox and Evangelical members met and suggested that the Orthodox Task Force and the Task Force on Relations with Evangelicals should be jointly responsible for continuing the discussion. The staff of the Office of Church and Ecumenical Relations was asked to call a planning meeting to prepare for a consultation to be held in 1995.

The planning committee affirmed as an overall theme for the consultation "Proclaiming Christ Today" and described the purpose of the consultation as follows: "The consultation should explore concerns that are common to Orthodox and Evangelicals for the good of the ecumenical movement, with the aim of strengthening Orthodox-Evangelical understanding on vital issues and joining hands for the welfare of the WCC and its member churches".

This consultation, held in Alexandria, Egypt, July 10-15, 1995, was attended by representatives of twelve Eastern and Oriental Orthodox churches, while Evangelical participants came both from mainstream Protestant denominations and from independently-instituted churches in Africa, Asia, Europe and North America.

The *Message of the Consultation*, which was thoroughly discussed, amended and approved by the participants, reflects their shared convictions and presents possibilities for further dialogue and co-operation. It also points

without hesitation to those issues which create difficulties between the two ecumenical partners.

We are happy to share this message with the wider ecumenical community, together with the papers presented by Rev. Prof. Ion Bria and Dr Kwame Bediako. To these documents we have also added a compelling description of the consultation by Prof. John Briggs.

Finally, we have included a paper that reflects the group work during this consultation. It focused on the following:

1. *Convergences and divergences.* What are our common theological convictions? What are our main divergences? Could we deepen the question of baptismal communion?
2. *Mutual theological/missiological enrichment.* Proclaiming Christ today. How do we proclaim a faith which has a history throughout the ages? Our common Christological ground. Proclamation and faith community. Proclamation and liturgical celebration. Gospel and culture. To whom do we proclaim? Witness in the midst of other faiths.
3. *Common witness.* Possibilities and mechanisms of co-operation for common witness. Possible co-operation in preparing/sharing material. Common witness for the construction of a civil society.
4. *Competition in mission.* "Evangelism" and "Proselytism". How can we avoid negative perceptions of each other? What is the missiological significance of existing local church(es) in a particular place? How do we make use of existing models of co-operation in other contexts in order to avoid competition in mission?
5. *Participation in the ecumenical movement.* How do we express together our commitment to the ecumenical movement? What are some of the areas where Evangelicals and Orthodox could contribute together to the ecumenical movement?

A clarification is needed at this point. The group reports were presented and discussed in plenary but not with the intention to reach formal agreement. Staff members were asked to edit these reports and present a synthesis. More explicit than the message, the insights coming from three groups offer a broad idea of the content and quality of the discussions during this encounter. This document is best seen as a memorandum recording issues raised in debate rather than an official document of the consultation.

It is our hope that this publication will be helpful for Orthodox and Evangelical Christians who are trying to find ways of dialogue, co-operation, and common witness. It is also our hope that this consultation will constitute

the beginning of a process aiming at strengthening Orthodox-Evangelical understanding on vital issues of Christian witness to our world. Certainly we are fully aware of the obvious limitations of both the consultation itself and the present publication. What finally convinced us to go ahead in spite of these limitations was, on the one hand, the pastoral, missiological and ecumenical potential of such a dialogue and, on the other hand, the manifest need for documentation on Orthodox-Evangelical dialogue and inter-action.

We therefore express our appreciation to *Syndesmos* for having kindly accepted to share with us this challenge and to sponsor the publication. In a period when ecumenical relations become more and more difficult, it is extremely important that we not only look at the feasible achievements of the ecumenical dialogue, but also -- and not least -- at its difficulties, obstacles and limitations.

Georges Lemopoulos

Huibert van Beek

Message of the Consultation between Evangelicals and Orthodox

Alexandria, Egypt, July 1995

Preamble

1.1 The forty participants in the Consultation on "Proclaiming Christ Today" held at the Coptic Orthodox Conference Centre of St Verena, Alexandria, Egypt, are grateful to God for the opportunity of meeting together, noting in particular that St Verena who lived in the third century had exercised a remarkable ministry of health and healing in Switzerland. This consultation was a follow-up to an earlier consultation between Evangelicals and representatives of the Ecumenical Patriarch held in Stuttgart, Germany in February 1993. In Alexandria, in addition to members of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, there were representatives of the Patriarchates of Alexandria, Antioch, Moscow and Romania and the Churches in Cyprus, Poland and in the Czech Lands and Slovak Republic, together with members of the Oriental Orthodox family from Armenia, Ethiopia, India and Egypt. The Evangelicals present largely came from member churches of the WCC, representing people of Evangelical commitment within the Anglican, Baptist, Lutheran, Methodist, Reformed, and independently-instituted churches, from Africa, Asia, Europe, the Middle East and North America.

1.2 We are most grateful for the generous hospitality offered by the Coptic Orthodox Church in whose life we were able to share by seeing something of their work among youth and being present at Pope Shenouda's weekly lecture attended by more than 5,000 people in the new cathedral of St Mark in Cairo. The liveliness of the witness of the Coptic Church within a dominantly Islamic society gave us great hope for the future of Christian witness in this part of the Middle East and provided a most stimulating

backcloth to our discussions. We are equally grateful to the World Council of Churches for enabling us to consolidate what was achieved in Stuttgart.

1.3 Our message cannot confine itself to the formal agenda of papers presented and ensuing discussion: perhaps even more fundamental was our praying together, listening together to the Word of God, and a rich diversity of personal encounters, whereby all came to appreciate the depth of Christian faith and experience incarnated in those coming from a variety of Christian traditions hitherto only imperfectly known to one another. Because of this we believe that personal encounter as much as written statements greatly advance ecumenical understanding and co-operation.

1.4 Thus Evangelicals learnt with great delight of some of the achievements of the evangelistic endeavours of the different Orthodox churches, appreciated the Biblical theology and deep Christological undergirding of their current missiology, and were impressed by signs of renewal within the Orthodox family. Orthodox members paid testimony to the emphasis given by Evangelicals to God's initiative in redemption, learnt with interest of the increasing respect of some Evangelicals for the historic witness of the church throughout the ages (the continuous witness of the Holy Spirit through the people of God in every generation) and the importance of the eucharist both for nourishing mission in the world today, and for protecting the church against irresponsible appeal to any individual's isolated experience.

1.5 Our consultation was of an informal kind and makes no formally-agreed policy recommendations.

Shared convictions

2.1 The theme of our meeting, "Proclaiming Christ Today", revealed the sharing of much common ground especially in the theology of mission, the centrality and authority of Scripture, and faithfulness to the apostolic faith amidst the challenge of a secularised world. These truths we affirmed whilst recognizing the cultural and historical conditioning of all our church traditions and theological formulations. Together we came to recognize our need to be open to the continuing work of the triune God in our witness in and to our particular contexts.

2.2 There were times in our conversations when Evangelicals sounded like Orthodox and Orthodox spoke a distinctly evangelical language, and we are grateful to God for that. Together we affirmed the centrality of Christ and the urgency of bearing witness (*martyria*) to Him in every part of the world.

2.3 'Proclamation of Jesus Christ requires a personal response... The Living Word of God is never external, unrelational, disconnected, but always calling for personal conversion and relational communion.' Such a 'conversion is more than appropriation of a message: it is a commitment to Jesus Christ, imitating his death and resurrection in a very visible and tangible way.' That which begins with a personal commitment must, however, immediately lead into a relationship with other members of the Body of Christ, the local witnessing community. 'The truth of the gospel calls for more than belief in terms of intellectual assent: it is a truth to be participated in.'

2.4 Solidarity between Christians of differing traditions is of crucial importance recognizing that some have suffered more than others: when one member suffers all suffer. In this spirit we share Christian love with all who are oppressed.

2.5 There was considerable discussion of the extent to which the proclamation of Christ was *implicit* within the witness of the faithful regularly celebrating the liturgy week by week, especially in times of persecution, and the extent to which it was necessary to add to this, *explicit* testimony to the good news in Jesus Christ in ways that extend beyond the liturgy and spell out the demands of the gospel in the contemporary world.

2.6 Associated with this was discussion of who might be involved in presenting the message of salvation: was this the exclusive responsibility of the local congregation or could that local congregation be aided in its task by more specialised national and international missionary bodies? Clearly such organisations should not go into any situation without first consulting the local churches in the area.

2.7 The importance of 'the liturgy after the liturgy' was stressed: that is to say that, complementary to the gathering of the people of God together for worship of the Triune God within the sanctuary is their dispersal back into the world, there to be witnesses of faith, there too to do liturgy, that is, to undertake the work of the people of God. Indeed it was suggested that whilst the number of celebrants in the sanctuary were limited, all believers had a priestly role to fulfil in daily witness.

2.8 The same emphasis was also present in our discussion of the relationship between verbal and non-verbal communication, especially since language had lost the essential experiential dimension always entailed within the way the Hebrew mind confessed its faith: we need to return to 'the integration of word and deed, of presence and proclamation in our witness'.

2.9 Attention was focused on the nature of authentic mission, which had to be that which followed the model given by Jesus himself. Thus its

particular marks had to be that it was costly, vulnerable to human rejection, holistic and always majoring on love.

2.10 The converse to this was the posing of questions about the ethics of evangelism: What were the limits of authentic evangelism? What methods were to be rejected as being in conflict with the model provided by Jesus? When does legitimate evangelism become illegitimate proselytism?

2.11 More attention needed to be given to those who receive our proclamation, for example, by giving more thought to their ability to respond to the message proclaimed, whether because of social constraint, economic condition, or the pluralistic context in which their lives are set. On more than one occasion speakers referred to the spiritual sensitivity and the appropriate apologetics required for proclaiming Christ in a context of many religions. There is a need to discern the Christ-ward call latent in people's faith traditions and bring them to a personal, experiential encounter with the unique and living Christ. Proclaiming Christ in a context of many religions should be undertaken, confident that such proclamation was able to make its appeal effectively in that forum.

2.12 Proclaiming Christ in a post-Christian culture which does its best to 'materialise humankind' is no easier. An analysis of all culture as a context for sensitive evangelism is necessary.

2.13 Our relationships in the past have not been, and indeed in many parts of the world today are not all that they might be, and therefore, each constituency would do well to consider what it has to repent of in relationship to the other and in relationship to the missionary calling of the church. Authentic incarnational witness cannot bypass the pain and obstacle of a divided church, including the need to heal the division between Western and Eastern Christianity.

2.14. In situations where different religions live in close proximity with one another, common action to secure a civil society (in which those of different religious faiths and none may participate fully and freely), by all religious leaders is highly desirable.

Areas where further work needs to be done

3. More work needs to be undertaken in the following areas of continued tension:

- (1) divergent ecclesiologies
- (2) the sacraments
- (3) the saints and their veneration
- (4) the place of Mary in the faith of the church
- (5) differing baptismal theology and practice

- (6) our understanding of salvation
- (7) effective mechanisms for co-operation in common witness.

Future plans

The Consultation:

4.1 COMMENDS the message and the reports of the groups for study, reflection and response by the appropriate offices of the WCC, our individual churches, and major Evangelical organisations.

4.2 RECOMMENDS that conversations between the Orthodox and those of Evangelical commitment continue with a view to identifying new areas of future co-operation, identifying the desirability of bringing together missiologists, theologians, those responsible for ministerial formation, and for work among the youth.

4.3 URGES the traditions from which we come to commit themselves to a continued process of collaboration and to a search for deeper understanding.

4.4 BELIEVES that similar consultations could usefully take place within the regions with a view to identifying the priorities for local ventures together.

4.5 OFFERS the present documentation to the forthcoming Conference on Mission and Evangelism of the World Council of Churches.

Conclusion

5. Rejoicing in the Triune God's gifts to us in one another, and, in the presence of the Holy Spirit in our midst, we pray for His continued guidance as we seek to support one another in hope in our common endeavour to fulfil the great commission. Amen.

(Quotations in this document are taken from papers presented to the Consultation).

Proclaiming Christ Today

Rev. Prof. Ion Bria

1. I was asked to share with this consultation an Orthodox point of view on the "missiological dimension" of the main topic: *Proclaiming Christ Today*. The exploration of this topic is a valuable initiative in itself, but inside the Orthodox-Evangelical encounter it takes on a special interest. It could help us to identify our missiological particularity within contemporary missionary trends and methodologies; it can show forth the possibilities for common Christian witness within the WCC and outside; it should dissipate current allegations against churches using evangelism and evangelisation as a tool of proselytism.

The context of this debate is an ecumenical situation of which many churches, WCC members or not, are saying that the search for unity is misplaced and unattainable, limiting ecumenism to good relations across denominational lines. Many still ignore the relationship between mission, unity and renewal, between personal relations and global unity of all Christians. Mission for unity or unity for mission? As if these were disconnected realities. We have to remember that since the beginning of the ecumenical movement, the churches were challenged to see visible unity in order to be able to engage in mission and evangelism together. To maintain the historical divisions among the churches means to undermine the mission of the church. I hope that the WCC, through its various programmes, will facilitate in-depth encounters between Orthodox and Evangelicals not only to compare our missionary ideas and strategies, but also to envisage possible connections and pairings between these traditions, so that we will overcome the missiological ignorance of one another, which means both lack of knowledge and lack of pastoral care for one another as Christian bodies.

What are the missiological grounds on which *Proclaiming Christ Today* could be approached? I will illustrate my presentation with material produced by the Orthodox themselves as contributions to the major

missionary conferences: Bangkok 1973¹, Melbourne 1980², San Antonio 1982³. As a matter of fact, the Orthodox have been stimulated in the last decades to formulate their principles and perspectives on mission, evangelism, common witness. A very rich and diverse documentation is available on the whole spectrum of the theme *Orthodoxy and Mission*⁴. In the next stages, more crucial than the question of what "mission" really means in Orthodoxy, is the matter of how the historic Orthodox Churches should engage in mission within the complex history of today's generation.

2. "At the present day, we do not know how to fulfil the Lord's command: 'Go and make disciples of all nations' (Matt. 28.19). But the great commission of Jesus remains a definite command...Christ remains the way to the Father"⁵. Indeed, the mission task is taking the place in a complex and difficult situation. In spite of the "return of religions" in Eastern Europe, old and new barriers have arisen. One of the difficulties is that the churches in the area are still accustomed to a cultural definition of the Christian tradition, taking for granted the transmission of faith in the new generation as cultural heritage. And the continuous growth of the evangelical (pentecostal-charismatic) contingent due to more emphasis on the emotional and experimental aspect of Christian life, has however left untouched the "old wineskins" (Mark 2:22), the cultural and social structures of society.

Proclaiming Christ Today confronts several crises: *Crisis of the Church*: loss of relevance and credibility as a sociological community. An

¹ "Salvation in Orthodox Theology", in *Orthodox Contributions in Nairobi*, edited by Ion Bria and C. Patelos, WCC Geneva 1975, p. 7-10.

² "Your Kingdom come", in *International Review of Mission*, vol. LXVIII (1979), no.270, p.139-147.

³ "Your Will Be Done". *Orthodoxy in Mission*, edited by George Lemopoulos, WCC Geneva 1989.

⁴ Ion Bria (ed.), *Martyria-Mission. The Witness of the Orthodox Churches Today*, Geneva: WCC 1980; *Go Forth in Peace. Perspectives on Mission*, Geneva: WCC 1987; I. Bria-Petros Vasileiadis, *Orthodox Christian Martyria*, Tertios, Katerini 1989.

⁵ Metropolitan George Khodre, "Koinonia in Witness", in *On the Way to Fuller Koinonia*, edited by Thomas Best and Günther Gassmann, Geneva: WCC 1994, p.125-6.

increased number of Christians have become disillusioned with the spirituality of their churches during the past decades. The renewal in the Church meets with great hesitation and even opposition. *Crisis of faith*: ignorance of tradition and liturgy among several generations after the war. Religious instruction and theological formation at the local level are the most urgent themes. *Crisis of culture*: politics, economics, science are predominant values, unrelated to Christian ethics. *Crisis of ecumenical community*, including panorthodox communion: the understanding of God's will for unity of all is not a priority for the local churches. The absence of the local ecumenism and an active inter-orthodox coordination.

3. I would like to draw your attention to certain missiological grounds and potentialities:

The origin of our vocation to proclaim Christ is the *integrity to Christ* himself, which constitutes the foundation of the life and ministry of the Church. He was captivated by his "Father's affairs" (Luke 2:49). In Him, the *oikonomia* of God, the mystery and history of salvation of the world, was revealed and realized. Jesus taught the Good News as the word of God, being himself the living logos of God. When the Jews reproached Jesus for not being taught, he answered: "My teaching is not mine but it comes from the one who sent me; and if anyone is prepared to do his will, he will know whether my teaching is from God (John 7:16). Jesus insisted on the relationship between love and teaching: "If any one loves me he will keep my word... Those who do not love me do not keep my words. And my word is not my own: it is the word of the one who sent me" (John 14:23-24). And the content of the Good News has a certain objectivity. It refers to "my commandments", to what is written in the book of Psalms (Luke 20:42), in the Law of Moses, in the Prophets (Luke 24:44).

Jesus did not remain in the desert, but explained the passages of the Old Testament about his messianic ministry in the temple and on the road (Luke 24:27-32). He interpreted the Old Testament as if it were his own personal revelation. He related the Old Testament to the Gospel as being Himself at the origin of both. Jesus knew that the Old Testament is the echo and a response to the call of the Word of God. It is precisely by his proclamation and teaching that Jesus created a circle of disciples: "Because he taught them with authority, and not like the scribes" (Matt. 7:29). Later, it is out of this close familiarity with the Risen Christ that the faithful apostles and disciples are committed to spread the Good News of the Kingdom. We can say that proclaiming Christ aims at the creation of a community of disciples as part of God's will to gather together His people. The proclaimed Word-Logos of God as the creator of communion and

community: "Truly, our fellowship (*koinonia*) is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3).

The risen Christ is now active in the Spirit, as he became visible and tangible on the day of Pentecost. The Spirit is Truth, who "will teach you everything and remind you of all I have said to you" (John 14:26). The Spirit is this witness, "another witness" (1 John 5:6), since he will not be speaking as from himself, but will say only what he has learned, and will teach you of things to come" (John 16:13). But the Spirit is freedom, like a wind blowing where it pleases. Where there are false teachers and teachings, the Spirit repeats strictly what Jesus said. Where there are faithful disciples and communities, the Spirit reveals the hidden mysteries of God's wisdom. "I have no greater joy than this, to hear that my children are walking in the truth... So that we may become co-workers (*synergoi*) with the truth" (3 John 4,8).

"You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Jordan and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). The apostles are sent not to disclose a new revelation but to re-tell and re-write what has been already revealed and manifested: "Beloved, while eagerly preparing to write to you about the salvation we share, I find it necessary to write and appeal to you to contend the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints" (Jude 3). To write "about the salvation we share" means to write about the same Christ, the Risen One, and about his manifestation to the Apostles. It is clear that by proclaiming the Good News about the same Jesus Christ incarnate, crucified and risen, the apostles gave birth to the earliest Christian communities: "We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life -- this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the external life that was with the Father and was revealed to us -- we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have the fellowship (*koinonia*) with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1;1-3).

Again, the word of life is personal, relational, the creator of a visible, tangible communion.

As Jesus has called his Apostles and shaped their community through his ministry of teaching and proclaiming the Good News, in the same way they preached and celebrated the Gospel establishing the first Christian communities at Pentecost, the point of departure for apostolic mission into the whole world. It is in that very moment that the prayer of Jesus for the unity of his disciples has been fulfilled: "I ask not only on behalf of those, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that

they may all be one" (John 17:20). The historical concretization of the prayer of Christ, in terms of community of the Church assembled in his name: "Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them" (Matt. 18:20) is part of the apostolic kerygma. Proclaiming Christ is not only taking place in and through the Church, but it aims at the edification of the Body of Christ.

This centrality of Christ in the building up of the Church has several aspects:

On the one hand, the proclamation of Jesus Christ requires a personal response, the faith which means communion with God. The living word of God is never external, unrelational, disconnected, but always calling for personal conversion and relational communion. It is also an act of salvation, because the Holy Spirit visits and invades the human person, liberating him from sin and passion, purifying the heart. The faithful become the temple of the Holy Spirit, receiving the divine grace and privilege of being God's children (Rom. 8-15). However, personal conversion is more than the appropriation of a message; it is a commitment to Jesus Christ, imitating his death and resurrection in a very visible and tangible way. The hearing of the Good News of salvation and the response of faith leads to the incorporation into the communion of Christ's body (1 Cor. 12:13) through baptism in the name of the Holy Trinity. The "garments of skins" (Genesis 2:21) of the Old Adam are changed into the garments of light of the New Adam: "As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ" (Gal. 3:27). The proclamation of the Good News, personal conversion, faith, a sacramental act of communion are integral parts of the Christian discipline.

We are not analysing here the Orthodox perceptions on missiology, for which *martyria* is a decisive concept. We are saying that it is not a concern for transmission and reception of message (teachings, doctrine) which justifies mission. It is too restrictive to say that by explaining the Scriptures (exegesis), we exhaust the mission, or reduce conversion to an emotional or intellectual acceptance of the Word of God. The dynamics of Scriptures in mission is essential, but the stream from the hermeneutics to the appropriation of the message is too strict. The mission stream springs from the person of Jesus Christ himself and means to assume what he himself did: to glorify the name of God among nations: "As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sake I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth" (John 17:18-19). The dynamics of glorification of the name of God in mission is obvious. This is the call of the worshipping community. It is not the hermeneutical understanding which motivates the personal response, but the call of Christ,

echoed by the apostle, to *koinonia* in which the person finds identity in the presence and in adoration of Christ. *Metanoia* is not simply a hermeneutical conviction, but liturgical relational decision: "And this is his commandment, that we should believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he has commanded us. All who obey his commandments abide in him, and he abides in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit that he has given us". (1 John 3:23)

Christian life is based on a personal confession of faith. There is no baptism without confessing the faith: "I believe in one God..."; there is no Eucharist without repeating the same confession: "We believe in one God". A community contemporary with Christ, a witnessing community of the risen Lord, represents the apostolic community. The twelve Apostles had a central and decisive role in the passing of the Good News. In the Gospel, Mary Magdalene (John 20:16-18) proclaimed to the Apostles the Good News of the Resurrection. Since the beginning, the Church preserves unity in a common confession of the apostolic faith (Acts 2:42). The Church is a community of disciples of Christ living in continuity through faith, baptism, *metanoia*, eucharist with the Apostles, and open for all the nations.

For our subject, it is important to reflect deeper on the link between the Apostles, the Church of Pentecost and baptism, because all these realities indicate the inclusive character of divine *oikonomia*. With the Apostles, Jesus opens his embracing arms for the whole *oikoumene*. The Pentecost Church becomes a sign for the universal Church; *baptism* is not only a sacramental immersion into the grace of God but also a visible connection among all nations. "There is no other name under heaven given among mortals, by which we must be saved" (Acts 4.12).

Moreover, proclaiming Christ means to share the totality of Christ's Gospel and ministry. This ministry includes not only verbal proclamation, but healing, exorcisms, the promise of the age to come, concrete action related both to personal salvation and to the rule of God over creation and history. The New Testament recognizes the cosmic leadership of Christ, the glorification of the Living God as Lord of history and Saviour of the World. At the heart of the Gospel lies the cross of the Risen Christ, on which sin and death have been defeated by Christ's sacrifice and the world restored. This is a sacrifice of the reconciliation of all nations. The Kingdom of God is already given in this Cross and Resurrection: "The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe in the Good News" (Mark 1:14-15).

However, powers of evil are still at work until the last enemy is destroyed (1 Cor. 15:25). The first Christians understood that an urgent need for the Church is to centre her life upon the death and resurrection of Christ,

not only commemoration of past events, but also a celebration of the redeeming power of the Cross. The disciples have to resist not only personal sin, but also the idolatry of this world, the hidden powers of darkness which invade people's lives, so that they may be enabled to receive the divine light.

In concluding this section, we can say that *Proclaiming Christ Today* to those who have not heard the Gospel, as well as to those who are no longer in a living contact with the Church, means a call to repentance and to personal faith, and the confession of faith: "I believe". As faith is relational, it is affirmed and manifested in an act of sacramental communion: baptism.

Baptism in the name of the Holy Trinity breaks fundamental barriers between God and humans, and incorporates into the people of God those who are excluded and scattered. It is in the local Church that the Holy Spirit realizes that inclusive koinonia extended by Christ himself in the Eucharist. By extending laterally the Pentecost community, the Church remains contemporary with Christ and his Apostles in the power of the Holy Spirit. The Church also participates in God's reconciliation. A social community with the Church at its centre should provide identity in the pluralistic environment which surrounds it.

The Church is not simply an instrument for mission, but the realization of mission, the scope of mission. Hence, the paradigmatic nature of the Church in the world as inclusive community. The Church grows by increasing the Pentecost community, by the articulation of new members to Christ's body: "I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd" (John 10:16). On his cross he assumes the sufferings of all. He incorporated into the people of God those who were excluded (Luke 5:27-32; 19:1-10), offering koinonia to all that were scattered. By celebrating Baptism and Eucharist, the Church opens the koinonia of God to everyone, becoming a fellowship of all nations.

This leads me to the second point.

4. In the Orthodox tradition, there is no private or isolated liturgy. Since all celebrate the same faith, all are at the same time concelebrants and communicants: praying, singing, chanting, confessing their faith. As at Baptism, every believer confesses his or her own personal faith: "I believe in one God the Father...". Before receiving Holy Eucharist, the Christian has to repeat his or her personal faith: "I believe...". The liturgical community gathered together "to do this in remembrance of me", is by this very fact a witnessing community. A place of gathering for praying and for sharing the Body and Blood of Christ, every local parish is also a point of

departure into the world to share the joy of the resurrection. The worshipping assembly is prepared and sent as an evangelizing community. Therefore, for the Orthodox, the missionary life and structure of every parish is the key to practising the proclamation of Christ today. For the responsibility of every believer does not end at the geographical and cultural border of his community, but extends to other communities, such as the people who do not know the Gospel.

In the liturgy, the verbal proclamation of the Gospel is inseparable from the doxological way of praying and from the symbolic ritual of the sacraments. It prevents the Orthodox separating doctrines from prayer, Biblical text from hymnology, Biblical stories from hagiography, and the lives of saints. It overcomes the contradiction between doctrinal teachings and personal experiences. *Lex credendi* goes together with *lex orandi*.

The liturgy was the most solid and viable pillar of resistance during centuries of restrictions, foreign dominations and persecution. It was the liturgical assembly, the *communio sanctorum*, discreet in its institutional visibility, which became a symbolic community during the communist regimes in Eastern Europe. Liturgical worship has kept the Church alive in spite of oppression. Certainly, it has been forgotten and even lost among many post-war generations, especially in the big cities. However, it represents a living continuous transmission of the witness of the Scriptures and of Christian tradition.

Liturgy opens the horizon of the Kingdom of God for all humanity in the midst of history, it opens the communion of God for scattered people. This is a sacred time and a sacred place where people bring forth everything of their existence and commit their lives into the hands of the Creator and Saviour: "Thine own, of thine own, we offer unto thee in all and for all".

In discussing the missionary nature of the church, the Orthodox have proposed a typology of mission and witness. It corresponds with the history of their mission and especially with this constant tradition in which worship and liturgy have been essential factors of proclaiming and confessing Christ through the ages. We call this typology: the "*Liturgy*" after the *Liturgy*⁶ whose main affirmations are the following:

- Mission cannot be exercised without reference to the Church as a community contemporary with Christ. The Church's mission cannot construct the Kingdom of God from historical forces and materials, but she

⁶ Ion Bria "The Liturgy after the Liturgy", in *Martyria-Mission*, p. 66-71; Emmanuel Clapsis, "Eucharist as Missionary Event", in vol. *Orthodoxy in Mission*, p.161-171.

can announce and show it in the eucharistic assembly, as a symbol of the final recapitulation of all creation and nations, and as the anticipated table of the Kingdom.

- At the heart of the Church's doctrines is faith in the Triune God rooted in the Scriptures and in the testimony of the Apostles who proclaimed the Gospel of Jesus Christ. That faith is the content of a personal confession without which there is neither Baptism nor Eucharist. Where that faith is distorted there is need for repentance and correction, because the koinonia of the triune God is a powerful paradigm for the Church as koinonia.

- Proclaiming Christ through liturgy implies the inculturation of worship, preaching in a language which can be understood. The link between one Gospel and diverse cultures is a positive reality, but not to the cost of breaking the link that unites everybody.

- In the liturgy the proclamation of the Gospel is not disconnected from Holy Communion, because there is no dichotomy between the ministry and teaching of Christ and his death/resurrection and reconciliation.

- The whole communion of saints is gathered at the liturgy.

- In order to respond to the missionary and pastoral needs of the faithful, each local Church, after the eucharist liturgy, takes the responsibility to modify, to expand and to propose new "liturgies" and "diakonies" thereby demonstrating a liturgical attitude in all areas of human life.

- There is a *Liturgy after the Liturgy* when Christians pursue their witness and vocation outside the temple, in the street, in the social halls, in the larger society. Nourished with the Eucharist, *the pilgrim bread*⁷, the food for missionaries and evangelists, Christians are sent out: *Go forth in peace in the name of the Lord*, to witness in faithful discipleship in the common round of daily life. Their authority flows from their liturgical sending which becomes fruitful through personal authenticity.

All these elements are needed if Christ's witness is to be complete. The typology of mission as *Liturgy after the Liturgy* can help us to understand the connections among various forms and definitions of mission, e.g.: mission as proclamation and invitation which emphasises personal salvation; Evangelism as a response to God's mercy and will for the whole of humanity; mission as service, diakonia, and actions aimed at the transformation of society; Evangelism as a witness to God's justice and righteousness, against inhuman conditions and unjust social structures; mission as a means for personal discipleship, holiness, and pastoral care,

⁷ *Your Kingdom Come. Mission Perspectives*, Geneva: WCC 1980, p.205-6.

which responds to God's compassion for lost humanity. The *Liturgy after the liturgy* is an inspiration and impulse to reconstruct the historical Church after a eucharistic model and vision.

5. With respect to the theme *Proclaiming Christ Today*, there are many areas of discussion. In the future, the role of such consultations will be to debate on certain polarizations, mutual theological misinterpretations and practical abuses. A current Orthodox perception of Evangelical bodies includes numerous features which need to be addressed, including missionary vocabulary. For example: an insignificant importance is given to the historic Orthodox Churches as movements for mission; there is no clear connection between personal piety and ecclesiological matters; less concern for visible unity of Christians through ecumenical consensus; bypassing establishment as a possible missionary tool; lack of pairing of personal salvation, sanctification to the transformation of society.

We need clarity about continuing differences, those are real hindrances to mutual understanding and credibility. We cannot afford to dismiss these differences and conflictual issues as "accidental" or "contextual" questions.

Areas in which we can concentrate our common effort:

(a) In their evangelistic witness, the Orthodox are not only concerned with the act of communication, which raises the problem of cultural diversity and language, but also with the content of the Gospel, with God's revelation and self-giving in Christ, which raises the problem of the articulation and confession of faith in Christ. For them, it is the tradition of a common Christology, articulated in a conciliar way in the IV-V century, which guarantees the unity, integrity and continuity of the Church. Can we confess together, as part of the apostolic tradition, a unifying Christology of the true God and true man? It is a question of recognizing whether the risen Christ we know is present in the life of others, and whether another Church has means for opening itself to the reality of this same Christ⁸. This is needed in order to liberate history from condemnations and anathemas and to find a method to treat other Christians and churches in the framework of a wide conciliarity which recognizes a polyphony of specific missions. Related to this is the nature of *Baptism*. The practice of re-baptism should be abandoned. What are the boundaries within which different expressions and practices of the apostolic tradition are acceptable? At the origin of acts of proselytism there is always a rejection of the validity of the baptism given

⁸ *On the Way to Fuller Koinonia*, report of Section II, p.239.

by another Church. Could we ask that the mutual recognition of baptism be accepted as obligatory while the divergencies which today appear to be irreconcilable be discussed?

(b) In a community contemporary with Christ, the proclamation of the Gospel, which is a task for all Christians, is inseparable from the celebration of the liturgy and the transmission of ministerial responsibility. Around the Gospel and the Altar, the worshipping community is prepared, educated and nourished as an evangelizing community. Within this fellowship some are called either to a discipleship in which their personal identity and loyalty to Christ are of paramount significance, or to a distinctive calling which may request an intensification of intimate proximity to Christ. Tradition specifies no limits to the material and medium to be used in communicating the Gospel message, but requires only that it be appropriate to the nature of mission. Tradition retains a number of teaching and evangelizing ministries: pastor, priest, teacher, theologian, bishop, evangelist, prophet. Could we interpret tradition as being concerned with other kinds of agents, transmission and communication: exceptional charismatic reminders, missionaries and evangelists? Does it provide sufficient ground for taking as comprehensive a view as possible of those who are "christophoroi" (bearers of Christ), co-workers (synergoi) with God? The Church has to recognize the gifts of the people, therefore developing and integrating them into its total mission; discerning these gifts, restraining some and encouraging others.

(c) The attitudes and strategy of past Orthodox missions have been heavily dependent on the "ecumenical" interests of big ecclesiastical centres, or on the nationalistic aims of local political leaders. Hence, because of a strange mixture of Christian theology, political ideology and national culture, which has restrained the "catholicity" of the Church, Orthodoxy has been confiscated and limited to the frontiers of 15-16 local churches. In reality, it is larger and more inclusive. It is here that we need a re-evaluation of history, but the Orthodox cannot give up a cultural tradition which indicates the peregrination of the Gospel in various places and times, and constitutes the memory of the local people.

In her pilgrimage, the Church has also cooperated in various forms of alliance with the states. Orthodox churches have still a strong memory of the so-called Constantinian symphony. Many voices have recently demanded that the Churches go beyond an ambiguous symphony, and look for a new relationship with civil society. For the majority of the faithful and especially for the hierarchy, the separation between State and Church is not an imperative. Many think that separation will diminish Church's cultural and missionary influence. However, a clear political autonomy is required, not

only because the distinctions between ethics and politics are always necessary, but also because the Church needs sufficient freedom to raise her voice, on behalf of the Gospel, when necessary, against political powers. The principle is the same: the Church has to defend what is necessary for *koinonia* in the Church and in society. She needs space to protect her memory, which gives her an identity, to worship the Lord of history, to hope in the coming of the Kingdom of God. This is especially true today, when political centres try to control the life of the people.

Behind the debate about the nature and the imperatives of Christian mission in our contemporary world, is the personal Christian experience of the faithful. It is not enough to make our contribution better understood by other Christian communities. Within ecumenical fellowship, all Christian communities, large and small, should have the privilege of giving and receiving, receiving and giving, their convictions and experiences. We have to be more sensitive to the diverse forms and strategies of evangelism. No one is untouched by God's gift and call. This recognition makes possible an exchange and reconciliation of gifts which the Holy Spirit offered and offers to the other Churches.

(d) *Proclaiming Christ* never involves coercion, manipulation or marginalization, but mutual respect and complementarity, respect of the freedom of religion of others. The presence of foreign missionaries in Orthodox countries has been arrogant and powerful, but also a failing and error of the local people. To change church affiliation through the efforts of another Church, including the use of "financial resources" to win converts for religious groups from outside, is an unacceptable practice. It requires not only a fresh examination of the nature and limits of religious liberty, but also an ecumenical attitude of foreign missionaries to the existing local churches. There is indeed a movement of people among the churches, and the Orthodox Church has to take into consideration the criticism of those who have left their ranks. We should not blame Christians for their actual Church affiliation. Each person must feel joyful, sound and settled in his or her community. There is something universal in each local Church, recalling that "all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28).

We are called to a common life in Christ and a common Christian witness⁹. This means:

⁹ *Orthodox Visions of Ecumenism*, edited by Gennadios Limouris, Geneva: WCC 1994.

- to surmount the danger of polarisation in finding *alibi* for competitive evangelism and systematic proselytism leading to endless and useless confrontation.

- Ecumenism is a challenge to the comfortable installation in a sinful sectarianism and fundamentalism. We must rediscover the importance of global unity and common witness.

- Common witness is not always possible. There are alternative or irreconcilable positions based both on the interpretation of the Gospel and perception and experience of the cultural and the social reality. Dialogue should continue in these situations, in order to discover whether these positions can be overcome or will remain Church-dividing.

(e) The Orthodox perspectives on mission and evangelism need to be more widely acknowledged within the ecumenical community. They should be more articulated and studied as part of ecumenical missiology. The Orthodox have been preoccupied with apostolic teachings (*tradition*), precisely because they wanted to protect the Gospel of Christ against "another Gospel". They proposed a sound common Christology, because the local churches needed a unifying principle around the centrality of Christ. For them, unity is not a euphemism, because it became already visible and tangible on the day of Pentecost, with the location of an *ekklesia* in the *oikoumene*, as its meaning, logos and destiny.

6. At this time when considerations about economics, politics, environment, and sexuality have become the prime interest of our societies, somebody has to speak about matters of truth and ethics, mission and evangelism, worship and spirituality. I am grateful to the WCC for organizing this consultation. The demands for truth and meaning, the need for personal faith and loving communion, the aspiration for the integrity and the totality of human being and life, cannot be bypassed with indifference. The course of history ignores more and more the mystery of God. How can we proclaim Christ in a society where politics control the life of the people, and establish the economic and social norms that ignore the values of the Gospel; a society in which the weak, the excluded and scattered have no prospects?

Speaking about the ministry of the Apostles, St Paul says: "Think of us in this way, as servants of Christ, and stewards of God's mysteries" (1 Cor. 4:1). "For you are fellow-workers (*synergoi*) for God" (1 Cor. 3:9). Following the Apostles, the Church understands and fulfils its mission, responding to particular situations; but in that endeavour she remains always partial and even imperfect. The difficult challenges the Churches are facing today require a renewal of our common evangelistic witness. The

Evangelicals tell us that a lack of spirituality in faith constitutes a chronic weakness of the historic established Churches. The salvation of society must be placed in the hands of persons of faith. The Orthodox Church brings the example of the evangelizing local communities, which by confessing Christ and by breaking the bread is maintained the link uniting everybody. One day, the working of each builder will become visible, because there is a common purpose. But, "neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth" (1 Cor. 3:7).

Christ wants a disciplined Church, ready to give witness to the power of the Cross and the Resurrection in the midst of a divided world.

Let us pray that this consultation be full of implications for us and for the whole ecumenical community: "As this broken bread was scattered upon the mountains, and being gathered became one, so may your Church be gathered together from the ends of the earth into your kingdom; for yours is the glory and the power, through Jesus Christ, for ever and ever".¹⁰

¹⁰ From the *Didache*, second century.

Proclaiming Christ Today

As an African and Evangelical Christian

Dr Kwame Bediako

Introduction

As an African Evangelical Christian of the twentieth century, my awareness that there are possibilities for fruitful theological dialogue between the Orthodox and Evangelical traditions of Christianity has been nurtured in two ways. The first has to do with the outcome of the work that I did for my book, *Theology and Identity - The Impact of culture upon Christian thought in the second century and modern Africa*, (Oxford: Regnum Books, 1992). In that book, I thought to bring together two eras and contexts of Christian history - namely the Greco-Roman world of the second century and the post-missionary African world of the twentieth century - in an attempt to show the relevance of the insights and achievements of the one context for the other. The point was not that the problems and issues that faced Christian thinkers in the one context could simply be read off from the other. Rather my approach was to select a number of Christian writers from the two eras, and to study their responses to some of the enduring questions in the area of Christ and Culture as far as possible within each writer's own world of thought and concerns. Only after I had studied each writer against the background of the ideas and forces which shaped that writer's Christian and intellectual career did I then proceed to seek analogous correlations between the two contexts.

My selection of ancient writers was Tatian, Tertullian, Justin and Clement of Alexandria; my modern African writers were Bolaji Idowu of Nigeria, John Mbiti of Kenya, Mulago Musharhamina of Zaïre and Byang Kato of Nigeria.

As my study progressed, it became increasingly clear to me that the relevance of the early patristic theology for the theological enterprise in modern Africa lay not only in the similarities of the context of religious pluralism but also an equally remarkable common concern to make sense of Christian identity against a background of inherited cultural and religious ideas which, on the face of it, appeared to be far removed from the 'adoptive' Biblical tradition. What made the deepest impression upon my mind was the ability of the early Church Fathers to cut through the swathe to the discovery of what Marcel Simon called 'the specific nature of Christianity', which enabled them - against all the odds, and supremely against Celsus in the book that Origen wrote in response to him - to vindicate for their Christian conscience a place to feel at home in the common culture that they shared with their non-Christian contemporaries. As I wrote then,

In this regard, our ancient analogue shades into an ancient model and reveals the Fathers as truly our masters. For in the thinking of those Fathers I studied, the Christian Gospel came to constitute an intellectual and historical category in its own right; it not only provided them with a precious interpretative key for discerning the religious meanings inherent in their heritage, so that they could decide what to accept and what to reject; in the Gospel they also found an all-encompassing reality and an overall integrating principle which enabled them to understand themselves and their past, and face the future, because the Gospel of Jesus Christ became for them the heir to all that was worthy in the past, whilst it held all the potential of the future. (Bediako, 1992: 439-440)

The second route to my conviction regarding the potential of Orthodox-Evangelical theological dialogue as an African Evangelical Christian has to do with some observations made by, as he was then, Prof. Bishop Anastasios Yannoulatos, at the September 1973 Ibadan Consultation on Christian dialogue with traditional thought forms, and published in the proceedings of that consultation, *Primal World Views - Christian involvement in dialogue with traditional thought forms*, (edited by John B Taylor, Ibadan: Daystar Press, 1976).

Archbishop Anastasios Yannoulatos was speaking on 'Growing into an awareness of primal world-views', and he related his observations to the particular situation of the forms of the Christian life which had grown in Africa as a result of the modern missionary movement from the West, noting

the specific nature of the pre-Christian religious heritage of much of the continent. He asked:

Have we offered the people of primal world-views the best we have? Have we made available to them all of the twenty-century-old tradition of the Church, not least that of the first centuries when Christians lived in a comparable climate of primal world-views? Or have missionaries only tried to transplant the Christianity and the problems of the western Europe of the 16th century onwards? Can it be true that, owing to these inadequacies, Christians from primal societies, as in Africa, were not given all the possibilities and all the material that would have enabled them to make an appropriate selection, and were therefore forced to seek to re-discover in their traditional rites some vital elements of the religious experience - such as the sense of total devotion, of being cut to the heart, of deep symbolism, or of participation of the whole person in worship? Were they offered all the wealth of the tradition of the first millennium of the Church "extending from end to end of the *oikoumene*", or were they presented only with a dry, moralising type of Christianity? (Yannoulatos, 1976: 75-76).

For many years, I have regarded ancient Greek religion and ancient Roman religion as variants of primal religion, even though, unlike the majority of modern primal religions, they had literary forms for their expression. I found the Archbishop's comments very seminal indeed, but they also confirmed the results of my own observations.

In the rest of this paper, I shall concern myself with a subject which, from the perspective of my Evangelical self-understanding, as well as from the standpoint of my African experience of reality, I regard to be important in all our Christian engagement in mission in the world. The specific subject I have in mind is that of the evangelical affirmation of the uniqueness of Jesus Christ in a world of religious pluralism.

Christ: unique in relation to "other lords"

'Jesus is the Son of God', said the Christian evangelist.

'My shrine-spirit is also a child of God', said the traditionalist.

What is the next line in the discussion? That sequence in a constructed conversation between a Christian preacher and an African religious traditionalist may be taken to illustrate the kind of issues that are at stake in the Christian affirmation of the uniqueness of Christ in the midst

of the plurality of religions. It is not often recognised in Christian circles that theological affirmations about Christ are meaningful ultimately not in terms of what Christians say, but in terms of what persons of other faiths understand those affirmations to imply for them. In other words, our Christian affirmations about the uniqueness of Christ achieve their real impact when they are subjected to the test to establish their credentials and validity not only in terms of the religious and spiritual universe in which Christians habitually operate, but also and indeed especially, in terms of the religious and spiritual worlds which persons of other faiths inhabit. For it is, after all, in those 'other worlds' that the true meaning of the unique Christ is meant to become apparent and validated. Perhaps I need to stress that the procedure I suggest does not mean that Christian affirmations are to be shaped or determined by the content of other religious faiths, let alone be derived from those sources. The point is rather that by their very nature, Christian affirmations about the uniqueness of Christ arise from their relationship to the claims and presuppositions that are made by persons of other faiths for theirs. Essentially, there are no real grounds for affirming the uniqueness of Christ where there are no alternatives to be taken seriously. In the words of the apostle Paul:

For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many 'gods' and many 'lords', yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom they exist, and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist. (1 Cor. 8:5-6, RSV).

In the apostle's statement, the very affirmation that there is only one Lord, Jesus Christ, is made in relation to the other "so-called many lords". In other words, affirmation of uniqueness has meaning as it relates to alternative claims. Accordingly, the affirmation about the unique Lord Jesus Christ arises from how he is perceived in his relation to other "lords". The approach I am taking is essentially that adopted by Bishop Kenneth Cragg, in his book, *The Christ and the Faiths - Theology in Cross-Reference* (London; SPCK, 1986). Bishop Cragg states this viewpoint quite clearly from the start:

There would seem to be today a growing recognition that Christian theology must justify its being 'Christian' by undertaking a theology of religion at large and incorporating this into its traditional responsibility for its own distinctiveness. It is these - Christian theology in harness with a theology of religion and tethered around the theme of the Christ, - that this book aims to take in hand. (xi)

In my view, it is this approach that the New Testament, and indeed the Old Testament as well, take in affirming the unique divine self-disclosure that we have been given and which culminates in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Christian affirmations – as recognition not as assertion

Once the affirmation about the unique Christ is expressed in the terms I have suggested, it may seem to be so self-evident that it might not need to be stated. And yet, in point of fact, it is because the nature of our Christian affirmations is so often misconstrued by fellow-Christians and by non-Christians alike, that the issue can bear some elaboration. It is perhaps not an exaggeration to say that there is a general tendency in Christian circles to treat Christian affirmations as essentially theological *data*, as some sort of fixed grid of doctrinal positions which have an inherent meaning in and of themselves, irrespective of their validation in terms other than those in which they are stated. The affirmation about the unique Christ, accordingly, becomes one such theological *datum*. While there may be a case for treating our own formulations of our doctrinal positions in this way, I am certain that we cannot treat Biblical affirmations in that way. Biblical affirmations, while they have the character of convictions, nevertheless, are not given as fixed *data*. Rather, being an integral part of the total Biblical revelation, they share in the character and purpose of that revelation, namely, to provide the conditions for humans to make an identical response of faith in Jesus Christ whom they reveal and of whom they bear witness. Within the Scriptures this process can be identified in the apostle Paul's statement in *2 Corinthians* 4:13-14.

Since we have the same spirit of faith as he had who wrote:
'I believed and so I spoke', we too believe, and so we speak, knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into His presence.

The truth of Biblical revelation, therefore, is not just truth to be 'believed in' as by mere intellectual or mental assent; it is truth to be 'participated in'. Paul by his faith in Christ, finds that he has become a participant in the same truth as motivated the psalmist in Psalm 116:10. Another way of expressing this view is to say that the truth of Biblical revelation is the truth, *not of assertion, but of recognition*. In that sense, a Biblical affirmation concerning the uniqueness of Christ is not an arbitrary claim of assertion, made *a priori* in the interest of, or for the benefit of, any particular community, not even of the Christian community. The affirmation is the fruit of recognition, and thus, is intended, in centrifugal motion, to find its true significance in its application to the totality of humankind. Thus, such an affirmation, in

reverse centripetal motion, provides the opportunity and the condition for the perception of recognition, by others, of its significance for them. It is in this way that it becomes possible to describe the entire Biblical revelation as a witness, that is a witness that is borne by God, and especially to his Son, but also borne by those who, in response to the divine initiative, became partakers, by their recognition, in the truth of the divine witness. The cumulative effect of Biblical revelation, understood as witness, is the expectation that it will generate similar recognition of the truth to which it bears witness. Thus, in the well-known words of *1 John 1:1ff*:

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands, concerning the Word of life - the life was made manifest, and we saw it and testify to it, and proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was made manifest to us - that which we have seen and heard we proclaim to you, so that you may have fellowship with us.

The whole of the nature of the Biblical revelation may be said to be summarised in these verses. They show that the climatic divine self-disclosure was not in a set of documented religious formulae or theological propositions, but rather in a life - in a human life which could be seen, looked upon and touched. And yet the quality of that human life was such that it provided, and continues to provide clues for its recognition as truly divine in its origin, as it was truly human in its manifestation. Upon this recognition Christian affirmation makes its claims that the human-divine life to which it bears witness is the light of the world and the life and hope of the whole of humankind, as well as of the cosmos itself. To clarify further our argument, perhaps in counterpoint to another major religious faith, Islam, we may quote an observation by Andrew Walls:

Much misunderstanding in Christian-Muslim relations has occurred from the assumption that the Bible and the Qur'an have analogous status in the respective faiths. But the true Christian analogy with the Qur'an is not the Bible but Christ. Christ for Christians, the Qur'an for Muslims, is the Eternal Word of God; but Christ is Word Translated. That fact is the sign that the contingent Scriptures (also describable as Word of God), unlike the Qur'an, may and should constantly be translated... Incarnation is translation. When God in Christ became man, Divinity was translated into humanity, as though humanity were a receptor language. Here was a clear statement of what would

otherwise be veiled in obscurity or uncertainty, the statement, 'This is what God is like'. (Walls, 1990:24f)

In sum, then, the principle of recognition, focusing as it does on seeing Christ as God incarnate and accessible, becomes of crucial importance for rightly understanding the true character of the Christian affirmation concerning the unique Christ. As Christ himself said to the Pharisees:

You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is they that bear witness to me; and yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life. (John 5:39f)

The unique Christ: (1) Religions as traditions of response

Once the point is granted that Christian affirmations about the unique Christ are not assertions, but rather *invitations to recognition*, it becomes essential to engage the major question: What then is it that in Christ confronts us, which calls for our recognition? This is the fundamental question regarding the status of the unique Christ amid the plurality of religions. It is to be answered not by Christian claims alone, but also by conclusions, arrived at through working with the inward meanings of the religious worlds of other faiths. This is so because the indication of the status of the unique Christ is seen, ultimately, in a demonstration that He is able to inhabit those other worlds also as the Lord.

But even before we get to answer our fundamental question, there is a preliminary matter to settle. Our starting-point can only be the ministry of Jesus on earth, 'in the days of his flesh' (*Hebrews 5:7*, RSV), in other words, as the divine self-disclosure in and through him was offered for recognition to men and women. In this regard, it is perhaps instructive that in Paul's summary of the Gospel in *1 Corinthians* chapter 15, he focuses, in effect, on the actual events of the life and ministry of Jesus. 'He died for our sins, according to the Scriptures, was buried, was raised on the third day, according to the Scriptures. He appeared to Cephas, to the Twelve, to more than five hundred brethren at one time, to James to all the apostles, last of all to me', (*1 Cor. 15:3-9*). The point is that all these 'earthly' events in the career of Jesus came to be recognised as soteriologically significant; Paul's own personal testimony in vv. 9-11 to the efficacy of the salvific import and reach of these events is the sign that these events, validated by the witness of the Scriptures, did and do contain and do offer the conditions which make the recognition of their significance possible for others too..

This concentration on the 'earthly' ministry of Jesus is valid and indeed necessary, since it is in the circumstances of human earthly existence

that we are given to discern and to understand the religious dimension of human life in the experiences of men and women. In turn, what then comes to constitute the 'stuff of the sacred', namely the category of the religious in people's experiences, becomes important as the locus of the encounter between Christian affirmation and the plurality of the so-called 'non-Christian' religions which provide the immediate universe of spiritual meanings for a large portion of our fellow humans.

This is another way of saying that it would be false to conceive of the meeting of Christian affirmation with the religious meanings of other faiths in terms of mutually exclusive systems, or even of credal formulations. Rather, the encounter takes place in the things that pertain to the Spirit who, like the wind, blows where he wills. To quote Kenneth Cragg again:

In the mystery and the burden of the plurality of religions, there lies, surely, the supreme test of the meaning we intend when we say, 'I believe in the Holy Spirit'. (Cragg, 1968:71; see also Bediako, 1986)

There is an obvious analogy here with the attempts found in some authors in early patristic theology, particularly Justin Martyr and Clement of Alexandria (see Bediako, 1992). The major difference in my present approach is that in place of their notion of the pre-Incarnate Word (Logos) who operated as much in extra-Biblical tradition as in the Biblical, I evoke the activity of the Holy Spirit. Since we are concerned with religions, not as 'belief-systems', but as the matrix in which men and women experience and respond to what I have called the 'stuff of the sacred' in their human existence, it is possible to agree with John V. Taylor on how we may regard other peoples' faiths, writing in his book, *The Go-Between God - The Holy Spirit and the Christian Mission*:

I believe it is truer to think of a religion as a people's tradition of response to the reality the Holy Spirit has set before their eyes. I am deliberately not saying that any religion is the truth which the Spirit disclosed, nor even that it contains that truth. All we can say without presumption is that this is how men have responded and taught others to respond to what the Spirit made them aware of. It is the history of a particular answer, a series of answers, to the call and claim of him who lies beyond all religions. (Taylor, 1972:182)

Looked at as 'a tradition of response' to the reality and disclosure of the Transcendent, every religion can be probed, therefore, not so much for the measure of truth it contains, as for the truth of the human response to the

divine action within that tradition. As a tradition of response, every religion also displays within it 'the same tension between conservatism and development which characterises all human response to the call of God which comes through the new situation' (Taylor, 1972:183). It becomes possible, then, also to speak of a plurality within that tradition. Thus, it is possible to understand how one response to Old Testament religious teaching can lead to the Mishnah and the Talmud, whilst another response can lead to the New Testament. The distinction of strands occurs in the process of the encounter with Jesus, who is Christ the Lord.

The unique Christ: (2) What is it that, in Christ, confronts us?

Granted then that the Christian affirmation about the unique Christ in the midst of the plurality of religions encounters traditions of response to the disclosure of the Transcendent that the Holy Spirit sets before people, our task is to demonstrate how the Scriptural witness to the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, illuminated by the Holy Spirit, is the clue to the yearnings and quests in the religious lives of people. As Kenneth Cragg remarks, 'the critical questions for the Christian' is 'how to have the meanings of Christ become operative in human hearts' (Cragg, 1977:116). Here, there are three aspects of Christian affirmation about the unique Christ which readily stand out for consideration. The first is the affirmation concerning the Incarnation, namely, the affirmation that in Christ, God humbled himself and identified with humankind in Christ's birth as a human baby, born of woman, and endured the conditions of 'normal' human existence - in other words, the Incarnation is supremely the unique sign and demonstration of divine vulnerability in history.

The second aspect relates to the Christian affirmation about the Cross of Christ, showing forth the will to suffer forgivingly and redemptively as the very expression of the divine mind and the logic of the divine love. Accordingly all other attempts to achieve the redemptive ends, apart from the way of the Cross, are revealed as partial and inadequate.

The third aspect relates to the communion at the Lord's Table, in which the invitation to all who are united to Christ in faith to partake of the holy emblems of bread and wine - symbols of Jesus Christ's redemptive achievement through his body and blood - demonstrates the uniqueness of the making of one people out of the many of humankind. Accordingly, the reconciliation of broken relationships across racial, ethnic, national, cultural, social and economic barriers becomes an important test of the nature of a people's response to the disclosure of the Transcendent which the Holy Spirit sets before them.

It is possible to reformulate these three aspects of what confronts us in the ministry of Jesus Christ as follows: in Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit reveals to us a divine paradigm which confronts all religions, challenging men and women in three specific areas -- in our understanding of power and weakness, in our response to evil, and in our response to cultural and social enmity and exclusiveness. It is by these down-to-earth clues to the divine paradigm disclosed in the ministry of Jesus Christ that all religions are challenged and invited to make an equally concrete response, in faith, repentance and obedience. In this respect, Christianity too, in all our different traditions, formally equivalent to the other religions as traditions of response, is challenged to respond to the unique Christ who is the Lord, for, "It is not Christianity that saves, but Christ" (Walls, 1970:357).

In Jesus Christ, then, we have the threefold paradigm of divine vulnerability, the will to redemptive suffering and reconciling love, not as abstract notions, but as concrete events and deeds in a human life, and achieved in ways which Christian faith reads as expressive of the divine nature itself. As the Gospel of Mark records of yet another instance of recognition: "When the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that he thus breathed his last, he said, 'Truly, this man was the Son of God'" (Mark 15:39, RSV).

What, therefore, in Jesus Christ, confronts us, are clues to the recognition of divine self-disclosure and the consequent challenge to discipleship to the One in whose incarnate life that disclosure has been given. Thus the Christian affirmation about the unique Christ in the midst of the plurality of religions does not arise, first and foremost, from the theological propositions or credal formulations, but rather from the recognition of the divine nature expressed in actual historical existence. Kenneth Cragg is right to point out:

Sonship, then, before it becomes a term in creeds, is a reality in deeds. We have to read that central decision of willingness to suffer as the expression in the actual, of that by which it was sustained in the volitional. 'The cup which my father has given me'; 'Father, glorify thy Name'; 'Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit'. These were the prayers within which Jesus suffered. Sonship, in that immediate, existential sense, was the context of his doing. Therefore, we take it also as the secret of his being. If Jesus is "Son of God" in the music of the *Te Deum* and in the confessions of Nicea and Chalcedon, it is because he was the Son of God beneath the olive branches of Gethsemane and in the darkness of Golgotha. (Cragg, 1977:56)

Concerning also the divine Sonship of our Lord, Cragg remarks further:

That confession did not, and could not, mean adoption, or deification, or divination. For it could not be rightly stated except as the divine initiative. An acquired Sonship is not a fulfilled one. Only as we can say: 'God was in Christ' can we rightly say: 'Jesus is Lord'. (Ibid)

What remains important is the realisation that the focus of the Christian affirmation is not the assertion of a formula, but the recognition of an achievement in actual history which, in turn, provides clues to the source of those deeds. As one apostolic precedent of how that history is to be interpreted expresses the thought:

Although he was Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered, and being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek. (Hebrews 5:8-10)

The consistent New Testament pattern of affirmation about Jesus Christ, therefore, is to work from the actual historical achievement in the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, to the theological elaboration of the universal significance and application of that achievement. If we wish to follow the New Testament in our affirmation of the unique Christ in the midst of the plurality of religions of our modern context, then we also can have what Kenneth Cragg calls a 'sober, critical confidence' (Cragg, 1977:59) that the actual history of the achievement in the ministry of Jesus Christ is able to stake its claims in the religious worlds of other faiths. We can have such confidence if we hold also that 'the "mind of Christ" generates the "mind of the Church" about the Christ, and not the other way round' (ibid). The meanings of Christ as given in the symbols of the Incarnation, the Cross and the reconciling fellowship at the Lord's Table, can become operative in human hearts because he belongs there, and whatever is ultimate in the religious universe of every 'tradition of response', at least in intention, is Christ.

Proclaiming Christ Today: speaking in new theological idioms?

This also means that the encounter between the unique Christ and the meanings inherent in other religions takes place in the terms of those meanings themselves. *Acts 14:15-17* and *Acts 17:22-34* indicate that this is a possibility. In the process, it also becomes possible to explore new theological idioms without surrendering Christian content, for that content, strictly, is Jesus Christ himself. Elsewhere, I have attempted to demonstrate

that, in relation to the spiritual universe of African primal religions, for instance, it is possible to apply to Jesus Christ the religiously significant category of Ancestor, but in a far richer sense than is traditionally held about lineage ancestors. This becomes so because in relation to the meanings inherent in the spiritual universe of African primal religions,

Jesus Christ is the only real and true Ancestor and Source of life for all mankind, fulfilling and transcending the benefits believed to be bestowed by lineage ancestors. By his unique achievement in perfect atonement through his own self-sacrifice, and by effective eternal mediation and intercession as God-man in the divine presence, he has secured eternal redemption (Hebrews 9:12) for all those who acknowledge who he is for them and what he has done for them, abandon the blind alleys of merely human traditions and rituals and instead entrust themselves to him. As mediator of a new and better covenant between God and humanity (Hebrews 8:6; 12:24), Jesus brings the redeemed into the experience of a new identity in which he links their human destinies directly and consciously with the eternal gracious will and purpose of a loving and caring God (Hebrews 12:22-24). No longer are human horizons bounded by lineage, clan, tribe or nation. For the redeemed now belong within the community of the living God, in the joyful company of the faithful of all ages and climes. They are united in a fellowship which, through their union with Christ, is infinitely richer than the mere social bonds of lineage, clan, tribe or nation, which exclude the 'stranger' as a virtual 'enemy'. (Bediako, 1990:41-42, see further Bediako, 1995)

Conclusion: *Proclaiming Christ Today amid other religious faiths – the continuing encounter*

Conceivably it may be objected that the approach I propose is too open-ended, and even risky, in that it leaves many questions unresolved from the start, and that it holds many Christian theological propositions and credal formulations in abeyance. My response would be that, precisely, such an approach through openness and vulnerability, is what Christian witness to

the divine incognito in Christ requires. I, in turn, would ask whether we see our evangelistic task as the coercion of belief by the discrediting of the religious values of other faiths as 'traditions of response to the reality of the Transcendent'. Thus I would argue that our proclamation and affirmation of the uniqueness of Jesus Christ in the midst of other faiths, consists in commending the meanings of Jesus Christ as disclosed to us in the Scriptures, to men and women in their own words of faith, respecting their personality as beings created, as ourselves, in the image of the one and the same Creator, and yet seeking to 'move them Christward in the freedom of their personal wills' (Cragg, 1977:166). Accordingly, proclaiming Christ today becomes also an exercise in spirituality, one in which we affirm a commitment to the ultimacy of Jesus Christ, whilst accepting the integrity of other faiths and those who profess them.

I wish finally to refer to the massive 'other faith' operating in the context in which we are meeting. It is an 'alternative' which is being fervently commended in my own home country too. I shall do so by recalling a remark by Bishop John Taylor, citing Bishop Kenneth Cragg, on what lies at the heart of Christian-Muslim differences. The observation helps to focus our attention again on the encounter which truly takes place 'in the things that pertain to the Spirit', as expressed in actual history:

The contradictions between Muslim and Christian fidelity can be seen to arise in large part from the different ways in which the Messiah and the Prophet responded to the same situation when it confronted them. Each was sure of his call to show men a new way, preaching, gathering the crowds, training his disciples; and each was faced with the opposition of the religious leaders, rejection and disaffection of his followers. What did he do? Jesus chose to go on in the same way, in the same spirit. He bowed his head to what was coming; he accepted rejection, failure and death, entrusting the outcome to God. In the case of Mohammed, it looked for a moment as if he too would take the way of suffering; but then he decided to fight back on behalf of the truth. He raised his army and marched on Mecca: and that was the turning point in his career and the birth of Islam. From these two choices, one can derive the fundamental difference between Christian and Muslim ideas of God's nature. The gulf between them is seen, as it were, in cross section; for it is nothing less than the cross which is now demanding our decision. Once more we see that the evangelism of the Holy Spirit consists in creating the

occasion for choice. The servant of the Gospel can do no less and perhaps need do no more. (Taylor, 1972:188-189). Bishop Taylor's observations bring us full circle: Proclaiming Christ today also implies providing, in Christ-like humility and in Christ-like vulnerability, the conditions which make the perception and recognition of Jesus as Christ the Lord, possible. In this task, it is my conviction that Orthodox and Evangelicals have much to learn from each other.

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A Lot in Common

Orthodox and Evangelicals Compare Notes

Prof. John Briggs

The year 1054 is one of the most important dates in human history: it marks the tragic schism of the western and eastern churches leading to mutual recriminations and excommunications. This caused not only canonical separation, but also an increasing lack of mutual understanding between the two great traditions which has smouldered for nearly a thousand years.

Actions taken during that millennium have done little to heal this grievous wound; rather they have served only to aggravate the situation. From the time when the Crusaders, set upon liberating Jerusalem, found the taking of Constantinople a more attractive option, a culture of suspicion between eastern and western Christendom has existed.

Not least among causes perpetuating this is the long history of Uniatism: from the 12th century onwards the Vatican has allowed a number of Eastern Rite communities to retain their own practices in liturgy, canon law and the parochial ministry of married priests on the one condition of accepting the primacy of the pope.

Rather than being a practice of ecumenical accommodation, which the Roman Catholic Church now recognises as not being the case, the establishment of new Uniate communities over the years has been seen by the Orthodox as a major way of proselytising not just individuals but whole communities. The creation of new Uniate churches has, therefore, increased the suspicion between Eastern Rite and Latin Rite Christendom.

Protestant missionaries have added to this distrust when, confronted by the difficulty of work among Muslims, they have turned to proselytise members of the Orthodox community instead.

Within the fellowship of the WCC a forum exists for the churches of the east to talk with other Christian communions. Fundamental to this

activity is a mutual respect for the integrity of the other and, more than that, a genuine appreciation of the heritage of faith that each represents. Much of this work has been undertaken within the general work of the Faith and Order Commission in Unit I, but in addition a number of bilateral conversations between the Orthodox and other Christian world communions have been held.

Less formal than these meetings have been conversations between members of the different Orthodox churches and people of evangelical commitment. These talks arose after the WCC's Canberra Assembly (1991) when it became apparent that Evangelicals and Orthodox shared concern on a number of issues, such as the centrality and authority of Scripture, fidelity to the apostolic faith amid the challenges of secularised world, and the boundaries of legitimate diversity within the life of the WCC. Particularly influential in initiating these talks was the late Walter Arnold, a Lutheran pastor from Stuttgart, Germany, who hosted the first meeting in his home city in February 1993.

At that meeting representation from the Orthodox side was confined to members of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, following an early visit of Evangelical leaders to Istanbul. The meeting provided an opportunity for each side to understand the traditions of the other and to discover how much common ground could be found in the credal testimonies to the apostolic faith.

Gather together

The theme for the most recent meeting between Orthodox and Evangelicals, held in Alexandria, Egypt, in July, was "Proclaiming Christ Today". The meeting was attended by members of 12 different patriarchates and churches from both the Eastern and the Oriental Orthodox families. Evangelical participants came from both mainstream Protestant denominations and from independently instituted churches in Africa, Asia, Europe and North America.

Thus the two sides of the conversation did not represent matching partners: the Orthodox members came from their specific canonical jurisdictions but the Evangelicals came from different churches representing a movement within those churches and not those churches themselves.

The fruitfulness of the conversation was greatly aided by the richness of the spiritual tradition of the Coptic Orthodox Church under the leadership of Pope Shenouda III, who entertained the consultation to a reception at his residence. Pope Shenouda, who before becoming pope had been bishop for

Sunday school work, explained the importance of the Sunday school movement to the life of the Coptic Church today.

There are some 30,000 Sunday school teachers in Cairo alone. Two teachers are allocated to each class, one to teach and one to care for discipline. Classes have to be held on both Sundays and Fridays to make maximum use of the limited accommodation available to the church: in some places classes might be held four or more times a day.

Members of the consultation interrupted their conversations to attend Pope Shenouda's mid-week Bible lecture in St Mark's Cathedral, which was well filled with more than 6,000 people. The first three-quarters of an hour was spent answering questions sent up in writing by those present. Some of the questions were theological, some practical, and all received fair answers, though on one or two occasions the pope directed his people to the parts of the Bible where the answers could be found.

Thereafter he shared a Biblical meditation on the significance of time: opportunities taken to do God's will, time squandered and opportunities lost, and then the challenge of how the vast congregation was to exercise stewardship over the time God has given it.

Pope Shenouda, who has written widely in a simple manner to expound the meaning of the Scriptures for his people, gave members of the consultation examples of his work, affirming that "we depend upon the Bible". The pope said he was very happy to join together with Evangelicals on that basis.

Consultation participants also took the opportunity to see something of the strength of the youth work of the church under the direction of Bishop Moussa. If, as has been suggested, the Coptic Church's approach to the challenge of other denominations is to make its own worship and witness so complete and spiritually satisfying that proselytism no longer presents an attractive option, then all the evidence seems to suggest success. This is all the more remarkable for taking place within a predominantly Islamic society, whose vocal and fundamentalist element has given the Coptic Church its own martyrs in the contemporary world.

"Ortho-gelicals"?

In terms of Pope Shenouda's meditation our meeting together was our "time", our opportunity to deepen trust, to understand both fears and hopes, not just superficially but in the context of long histories of witness and suffering. Thus it was important that we prayed together, listened together to the word of God, and came mutually to appreciate the depth of faith and experience incarnated in the other. Our meeting was as much a

sharing of faith as a checking out of each other's doctrines. And as we talked some Evangelicals sounded remarkably Orthodox while Orthodox members spoke a distinctly evangelical language.

In this way, as we discussed the theology of mission we discovered much common ground on the centrality of Christ and the urgency of bearing witness (*martyria*) to him in every part of the world today. Such proclamation is not just a matter of words, especially since language today does not necessarily embrace the experimental dimension present in Hebrew usage. This underlined the need for a return to "the integration of word and deed, of presence and proclamation in our witness".

The extent to which the proclamation of Christ is implicit within the witness of the faithful regularly celebrating the liturgy week by week, especially in times of persecution, was carefully considered. There is also the need to add to this witness explicit testimony to the good news in Jesus Christ in ways that extend beyond the liturgy and which clearly spell out the demands of the gospel in the contemporary world.

Evangelicals listened with interest as Orthodox explained their concept of "the liturgy after the liturgy". Complementary to the gathering together of the people for the worship of the triune God within the sanctuary is the scattering of the people of God back into the world, there to be witnesses of the faith, to undertake liturgy, which literally means the work of the people of God. While the number of celebrants in the sanctuary may be limited, all believers have a priestly task to tackle in their daily witness.

Who then should be the presenters of the gospel? Is this the exclusive responsibility of the local congregation, or can that local congregation be aided in its task by more specialised national and international missionary bodies? Clearly, consultation with local congregations is essential, but the question of the relationship between mission agencies and local churches needs further exploration. A large part of the problem is that those most inclined to insensitive evangelistic activities are those who are most distant from the ecumenical fellowship and who very often have a reductionist view of the church.

Jesus' mission model

The consultation thus began to look at the nature of authentic mission, which has to be that which follows the model provided by Jesus himself. Accordingly, its particular marks are that it would be costly, vulnerable to human rejection, holistic and impregnated in its every action by sacrificial love. The converse to this identification of authentic mission is approached through questions concerning the ethics of evangelism: what

are the limits to authentic evangelism? Are there styles of evangelism that need to be rejected as in conflict with the model provided by Jesus? When does legitimate evangelism turn into illegitimate proselytism?

Both sides of the conversation agreed that the proclamation of Christ "requires a personal response... The living word of God is never external, unrelated, disconnected, but is always calling for personal conversion and relational communion". Conversion is not just "the appropriation of a message; it is a commitment to Jesus Christ, imitating his death and resurrection in a very visible and tangible way". "The truth of the gospel", it was affirmed, "calls for more than belief in terms of intellectual assent: it is a truth to be participated in".

Entering into such a relationship with the living Christ, although starting with personal commitment, must immediately lead into a relationship with other members of the local witnessing community so that, in such a process, the personal and the corporate dimensions find common focus.

The proclamation of the gospel is never undertaken in a vacuum, and hence the call is made for more attention to be given to those to whom evangelism is directed. To what extent is their ability to respond conditioned by social constraints, economic circumstances, or the pluralistic context in which their lives are set?

On more than one occasion speakers referred to the spiritual sensitivity and the appropriate apologetic required for proclaiming Christ in a context of many religions. There is a need to discern the Christward call latent in other people's faith traditions and to help them come to a personal, experiential encounter with the unique and living Christ. Accordingly, proclaiming Christ in a context of many religions should be undertaken, confident that such proclamation is able to make appeal effectively in that forum. Proclaiming Christ in a post-Christian secular culture which does its best to "materialise humankind" is certainly no easier option.

The consultation noted that where people of different religions live in close proximity with one another, it is highly desirable that all religious leaders should initiate common action to secure a civil society in which those of different religious faiths, and none, may participate fully and freely. Those present at the consultation confessed that relationship between the communities had not in the past always been good. That this is perpetuated in some parts of the world today gave added poignancy to these conversations as a means to developing trust and eliminating unnecessary causes of apprehension.

Both meeting at Stuttgart and the more recent meeting in Alexandria provided assurances that such a process can have a creative outcome.

Insights from the Groups

The following notes on the discussions within the several groups were presented to the plenary but there was no attempt to secure agreement on this wide ranging cluster of issues: accordingly they represent views presented but not ratified positions .

Historical wounds and contemporary rapprochement

Prejudices, caricatures and distorted images very often seem to determine Evangelical attitudes towards Orthodox Christians and sometimes Orthodox attitudes to Evangelicals. Attitudes, for instance, which regard a predominantly Orthodox country simply as a pagan territory never touched by Christianity have deeply hurt the feelings of Orthodox Christians. On the other side, while recognizing the problem associated with foreign-funded sectarian activity, Orthodoxy's indiscriminate labelling of Protestant and Evangelical groups as 'sects' have created feelings of rejection and misconception.

There is little knowledge in many Western Christian circles of the fact that Orthodox feelings of anger about proselytism have a long and complicated historical background. The negative Western impact on Eastern Christianity did not start in the late 1980s with the invasion of Western groups into Orthodox lands, but goes back to the roots of the historical schism between West and East in the 11th century. Continued attempts by the Latin West to enforce an ecclesial union by coercion have added to long-standing fears within Orthodoxy of its becoming "Westernised" and divided by external ecclesiastical influences. The exploitation of vulnerable situations in the allegedly weaker Christian East shows an ignorance of a history of

Christian perseverance, resistance and martyrdom. This ignorance has often been the hidden foundation of Western attitudes towards Eastern Christianity.

Some Evangelical minorities also have a history of persecution from state churches in Eastern Europe, and therefore harbour suspicions of any attempt to recreate the kind of Church-State relations which they see as a threat to their freedom. They also experience local situations where their reputation and, consequently, their life and witness are now libelled.

Mutual understanding involves, therefore, the recalling of a painful history. It might also involve on both sides a long process of the healing of memories and reconciliation through understanding. Within the broad framework of such a process, negative perceptions on either side may be corrected by studying each other's history as the work of the Holy Spirit, by empathically participating in each other's life of common worship, respecting the historical achievements of each other's traditions even when they appear at first glance to be wholly contrary to one's own beliefs, and beholding with deep gratitude the martyrs and saints of each other's tradition.

Mutual Theological/Missiological Enrichment

Orthodox and Evangelicals agree on the need to develop a clarified theological vocabulary of mission to express their faith. Theological differences must not be minimized for the sake of unity since real and legitimate differences do exist. The most important areas of agreement, however, are in the truths expressed in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (known as the credal formulation of the 318 Teachers/Fathers).

A strong Christocentrism within a trinitarian framework should serve as the foundation for Orthodox-Evangelical dialogue. Both sides should continue to stress the importance of viewing the Church as the body of Christ in time. There are, however, different emphases on how -- liturgically and sacramentally -- this faith community is lived out in diverse cultural contexts.

Orthodox and Evangelicals agree that the apostolic faith must be proclaimed to everyone everywhere -- within our Churches as well as to the world. A part of that task demands that we seek to "make Christians truly Christian".

Perhaps the most fruitful point of intersection between the Orthodox and Evangelical communities is to be found in spirituality. Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism share a common concern for true doctrine and a vibrant spiritual life. Our monastic and pietistic traditions converge on this point and offer us common ground for mutual enrichment.

Identifying Key Issues of Potential Divergence

Major divergences between Orthodox and Evangelicals hinge on baptism and sacramental practice, various misconceptions or aborted communications concerning the veneration of saints and the proper use of icons, differences about ecclesial organisation and authority, and whether the free and open competition of confessions in the "free market" of religious ideas is ultimately strengthening or weakening the life of both church and society.

The most divisive and counter-ecumenical attitudes and issues as understood by the Orthodox are: proselytism, ignoring or demeaning the history of martyrdom, ignorance and insensitivity toward a centuries-old Christian culture and the treating of it as if unevangelized, falsely or maliciously stereotyping popular Orthodox practice as idolatrous, unbiblical, backward, or lacking in spiritual depth.

Evangelical difficulties with Orthodoxy often tend to revolve around religious and civil liberty concerns, including the right of free assembly, freedom of speech and press, and freedom to disseminate ideas.

Evangelicals and Orthodox jointly disavow that syncretism in the dialogue with world religions which so affirms salvific universalism that it denies the sole Lordship of Jesus Christ and the uniqueness of Christian revelation. They are largely very close together on politically divisive issues, notably those on sexuality, which in some countries focus on abortion, homosexuality, sexual permissiveness, and hedonism.

Several topics, where theological divergencies exist, demand further clarification and future dialogue. These include:

- the understanding of conversion (individual decision versus community-based faith experience, single-event versus continued process, inner experience versus more holistic metanoia/repentance);
- the relation between Church and salvation. What is the meaning of salvation through or in the Church? What does it mean to affirm the uniqueness of Christ while at the same time not limiting the scope of the working of the Holy Spirit in the whole cosmos, i.e. beyond the institutional Church? This is particularly relevant within the context of inter-religious dialogue.

Among the numerous key issues, two of the more important that unite and divide our communities are the meaning of "tradition" and the nature of "baptismal communion".

(a) *Tradition*. There is a need to identify and to clarify Evangelical and Orthodox conceptions of tradition.

(i) A greater *knowledge* of tradition is needed by Evangelical communities. There is a need to raise the level of historical consciousness in the minds of believers. Some cultural contexts require more of this than others. Our faith has a long history and this must occupy a place of special importance.

(ii) The *content* of tradition remains an open question for Evangelicals. How much of the past has continuing relevance for the present? Clearly there exists an evangelical *paradosis* that goes back to the Reformers. Among Evangelicals there is less consensus about perceiving the life of the Spirit in the pre-Reformation period. While Evangelicals strongly wish to claim the Church Fathers as part of their theological heritage, some aspects of patristic theology cannot be accepted by certain communities because of its perceived lack of conformity with the Bible. The validity of icons in Christian worship remains a problem for some Evangelicals, and this should be discussed at some future date. For the Orthodox, tradition includes not just the reception of truths, but also a living connection with the past through the bond of the Holy Spirit in the Church, both in the past and now.

(iii) The *authority* of tradition requires a clarification of the relationship between Scripture and tradition: the ongoing life of the Body of Christ. Following the principle of *Sola Scriptura*, Evangelicals hold the Bible as the final authority for faith and practice. The Orthodox likewise ascribe to the Bible an authoritative role, but stress the importance of tradition as the proper context for Biblical exegesis. Hence, the Lord himself through the Church is the final criterion of truth. In order not to confuse national cultures with the Gospel itself, the Orthodox distinguish "T"radition (apostolic truth) from "t"radition (human customs).

(iv) The Gospel demands that we *participate* in Tradition by entering into communion with the risen Lord and proclaiming the Good News of salvation to those outside the Church. On this Orthodox and Evangelicals are in agreement.

(b) *Baptismal Communion*. Most would agree that infant baptism requires one's confirmation or a serious reaffirmation of baptismal faith at an age of accountability, so that both believer's baptism and infant baptism are viewed as complementary traditions. It was also widely believed that the Lima document on 'Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry' could usefully guide future conversations on baptism. Most non-Baptists believed that the 'rebaptism' of those already baptised in the name of the Triune God should cease but Baptists defended their right to 'rebaptize' those who so requested

it and believed that there was a clear need for sensitivity in approaching this issue.

The practices of baptism and baptismal communion highlight more than any other the great diversity within Evangelicalism. The identity of Evangelicalism, therefore, needs to be understood as a multiformed phenomena. Any comparison with Orthodoxy must be done on a community by community basis. Traditional differences remain over the validity of infant baptism and the efficacy of the sacrament. For the Orthodox, baptism is the sacrament of initiation into the kingdom of God and life in the Church. Some Evangelical Reformation traditions would agree but others would not. It was underlined that there is a need for further study, reflection, and response to the Lima Document on 'Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry' as a promising platform for both the Orthodox and Evangelical communities. Both Orthodox and Evangelicals, however, are agreed that God is not confined to the sacraments to bring about new life in Christ; we humans need the sacrament, but God does not.

A common missiological affirmation

As Orthodox and Evangelicals we affirm together that mission or witness is inherent in the very nature of the church. We seek a mediating principle between insensitive Evangelical proselytism and inordinate Orthodox territorialism. For Evangelicals this means a deeper level of respect for the liturgical, iconographic, and martyrial traditions of Orthodoxy. Mission should be focused on those outside the community of the church: it was a most serious breach of Christian fellowship to attempt to disquiet those who were faithful in their celebration of the liturgy. For Orthodox this means in some countries greater tolerance for pluralism and relaxed constraints on religious freedom.

Evangelization and "Proselytism"

That false activity which under the aegis of Evangelicalism seeks manipulatively to convert Christians from one confession to another through methods that contradict the spirit of Christian love and fellowship is to be deplored and condemned. We pledge to admonish fellow Christian believers asking them to desist from such practices, and from attitudes of confessional pride and inordinate ethnocentricity.

Although the common theological ground between Orthodox and Evangelicals is much broader than usually realized, there are examples of continuing conflicts and areas of theological divergence where future

dialogue and clarification are needed. Most of the conflicts start with inappropriate ways of perceiving one another. For instance, to pose the question "have you been saved?" to an Orthodox Christian would be both insulting and harmful. Proselytism thus seems to be inherent even before any conscious attempts are made to win converts from other living faith traditions. It already exists in any inclination to view another person's faith in terms only of one's own faith categories and understanding.

Open and strategic proselytism takes place in regions or in nations which have locally rooted forms of Christianity and where evangelistic attempts are made without consulting with the local churches beforehand. What makes the situation worse is the financial capacity of the sending organisations. This implies an imbalanced access to media and print technology, educational, medical and professional services.

That which tempts some people from the Evangelical tradition to engage in proselytism, deliberately or unintentionally, is a certain tendency to present an over-individualistic concept of conversion, by focusing only on a personal or individual relation to Christ to the exclusion of any rootedness in ecclesial community or tradition, an aspect which is more emphasized by the Orthodox.

As to the missiological significance of already existing local churches:

(a) Where a church has become deeply interwoven over a long period of time with a particular national culture or ethos, all efforts in Christian mission should respect that cultural intertwining, without ceasing to be critical in timely and restrained ways of excessive accommodation to a nation or culture.

(b) Evangelicals should inform fellow Evangelicals that the Evangel is already powerfully present in Orthodox liturgy and church life.

(c) Where the unevangelized are identified as the concern of the church's mission, great care should be taken not to identify covertly or disingenuously one's own specific cultural history with the will of God.

Dialogue with Evangelical sending agencies that are not currently part of the ecumenical movement, though extremely difficult, is imperative. Perhaps this could best be accomplished through the initiative of Evangelicals from within WCC member-churches. This would constitute an Evangelical-to-Evangelical dialogue. Ecumenically-minded Evangelicals should encourage those participating in ecclesiological and culturally insensitive enterprises to listen seriously to Orthodox concerns. For many Orthodox a halt in insensitive sending practices is a prerequisite to ecumenical dialogue and the building of trust.

Areas of missiological convergence -- A holistic understanding of witness

Two messages could provide a starting point for deepening our understanding of missiological convergence: Evangelicals in our consultation have learned anew:

- that Orthodoxy has a deep appreciation of Biblical tradition, its continuous re-reading and recapitulation in liturgy, and its continuing interpretation for contemporary times;

- that Orthodoxy has a profound missionary tradition and missionary understanding of the Church both in its history as well as in important signs of renewal today (i.e. Orthodox youth movements, Sunday School movements, etc.);

Christian witness has been maintained by the Orthodox churches for almost five centuries under successive foreign regimes, Muslim domination and difficult socio-political conditions, a fact that gives testimony to the missionary character and perseverance of the Orthodox faith tradition.

There was a clear consensus that the missionary task and nature of the Church, i.e. to give witness to God the creator, to proclaim the Lordship of Christ over against all powers in society, and to witness for the life-giving Spirit of God in all nations, is held in both streams of Christianity. The centrality of evangelistic responsibility as well as of the central role of the Bible in missionary work and in renewing theology was consequently affirmed by both sides.

It was also maintained that only a holistic understanding and practice of martyrria, uniting proclamation and action, liturgical and prophetic witness, personal spirituality and social responsibility, will serve properly the missionary task of the ecumenical community.

When examining areas of missiological convergence, it is also necessary to discuss the issue of religious freedom. A general affirmation of a shared mission responsibility includes, for most of us, the acceptance of a plurality of historically-founded Christian churches even in traditionally Orthodox countries. The proposition and notion of "canonical territories", according to which it would not, in principle, be allowed for more than one Church tradition to be present in any one region, does not seem to be applicable to the complex situation in some Eastern European countries today. On the other hand, it was empathetically affirmed that support for the witness of the local and historically-rooted Church community always has priority over and against any self-interested attempt to establish a new church tradition which has neither historical rooting nor is in ecumenical partnership with the existing local churches.

On this point, it should be kept in mind that in many Muslim countries Orthodox Christianity occupies the position of an inculturated faith with a long standing, centuries-old experience of survival in a Muslim context and in the communication of its message to a non-western environment. Its experiences therefore should not be easily bypassed but thoroughly considered, studied and supported by Christians of other traditions.

Imperatives for an ecumenical discipline of mission

More than once has the following question been asked: To whom shall we (both Orthodox and historical Protestant churches) address our complaints about proselytism? Can we really reach those organisations working outside the existing channels of ecumenical co-operation? What are the proper instruments and avenues of communication for dialogue with para-church organizations which have little accountability-structure with mainline churches?

It was emphasized on this matter that we need more effective mechanisms of enlarged ecumenical co-operation, an extended scope of mutual missiological education and principles of mutual accountability. The WCC and regional ecumenical organisations could help to encourage their member-churches as well as non-member Evangelical organisations to develop proper instruments to this effect.

The question also was asked whether we need a more developed ethics of missionary sending and an ethic of missionary receiving. It was suggested that principles for an ecumenical code of behaviour in common mission ("ecumenical discipline for mission") could be worked out as a means of strengthening mutual accountability and that they might be shared and tested with national associations of Evangelical mission organisations. Some preliminary points for an ecumenical discipline for mission were tentatively indicated in our discussions:

(a) Genuine and deep respect for existing local church traditions is a pre-condition for any participation in ecumenical common mission;

(b) Contact with local and neighbouring churches, informing them of evangelistic goals, methods and financial resources, is an imperative. Before entering into a given region, an invitation from locally-rooted churches to missionary groups or to personnel from outside should be a prerequisite;

(c) Being fully supportive of the missionary and social work of locally-rooted churches is a priority;

(d) A joint committee for mission could serve as a clearing place for evangelistic projects and for their periodic evaluation;

(e) No means should be applied which exercises coercion, financial pressure or cultural uprooting or which threatens the integrity of a local church;

(f) New converts should be directed where possible to existing churches.

Common tasks in the ecumenical movement

Despite conflicts and tensions, signs and new developments were reported from many countries of a growing rapprochement between Orthodox and Evangelical Christians. This very consultation here in the Middle East would probably not have been possible in this spirit fifteen years ago. In many countries personal encounters between Evangelical and Orthodox have increased considerably, new mechanisms of co-operation have been formulated and a new depth of mutual understanding has been developed. Unfortunately new evangelistic initiatives of a sectarian kind seem to endanger and partly to destroy what has otherwise been reached as a consensus in some regions.

The urgent need for increased mutual co-operation and learning is further underlined by the following factors:

(a) Both within Orthodoxy and the Evangelical movement there exist signs of a growing influence of an unhelpful conservatism and even fundamentalism which at its worst can impact upon the credibility of Christian witness. Evangelical and Orthodox Christians need each other to overcome isolation and to strengthen their respective ecumenical commitments;

(b) In predominantly Muslim countries insensitive forms of evangelistic witness have contributed to reducing and to endangering the operating space of historical local churches because they have sometimes led to hostile Muslim counter-reactions. Ecumenical sensitivity and co-operation between Evangelicals and Orthodox have, therefore, a particular urgency in contexts where Christian churches are in the minority;

(c) The successful activity of non-Christian sectarian groups and peculiar forms of religious ideologies is increasing in its influence. The existence of this common threat by sectarian religious groups outside Christianity or by these distorted forms of Christianity highlights the urgency of an improved Evangelical-Orthodox co-operation.

We rejoice that many forms of co-operation between Evangelicals and Orthodox already exist but they need further development. Among these

are: the establishment of societies for translating the Bible; societies for the cooperative distribution of the Bible; shared or coordinated ministries of compassion and relief; new organisations for the joint study of Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism; shared efforts in the recovery of patristic exegesis; some broadcast ministries, such as "Credo" in the Czech Republic, which receive questions from all callers about the Bible; scholarly societies such as the International Society for Biblical Literature, the Oxford Patristic Conference, the Evangelical Theological Society, and the Eastern Christianity sections of various societies for the study of religion, where the texts of ecumenism are studied.

Emerging features of our common participation in the ecumenical movement as Orthodox and Evangelicals include (a) earnest prayers for the deepening of each other's ministries and congregational life, (b) full and open consultation on emerging ministries, and (c) practising missiological principles widely agreed upon by both Orthodox and Evangelicals, such as cross-cultural sensitivity, timely and sufficient ecumenical consultation, restraint against presumptions about cultural superiority, and a reasonable level of toleration of diversity in doctrinal and sacramental practice.

With regard to future areas of co-operation between Evangelical and Orthodox Christians the following points have been discussed and suggested:

(a) *Practical issues.*

- strengthening ecumenical co-operation in Bible societies;
- increasing ecumenical co-operation in the production of catechetical material and visual media;
- developing common methods of Bible study;
- working out ecumenical projects for diaconal and social projects;
- establishing common seminars with college students or students in theological education;
- developing, on the level of the practical outworking of the faith, a functional co-operation in such areas as youth conferences, educational meetings and evangelistic outreach;
- encouraging Orthodox and Evangelical speakers to participate in the life of each others' churches;
- introducing courses on ecumenism and missiology in all denominational colleges;
- publishing articles on Evangelical-Orthodox dialogue in leading Evangelical-Orthodox periodicals;
- working out common suggestions for religious legislation in post-communist countries;

- developing agreed syllabi for religious education in state schools.

(b) Theological issues.

- developing a critical understanding of an ethic concerning the use of mass media;
- contributing to the continuing discussion of gospel and culture and appropriate ways of contextualizing the faith;
- cooperating in the development of a "missiology for the West";
- developing a theology of inter-religious dialogue which does not surrender the uniqueness of Christ to theological relativism;
- contributing to the development of a theology of ecology.

(c) Ecumenical issues.

- encouraging WCC Evangelicals to work as ecumenical mediators to other Evangelicals in explaining Orthodoxy, its liturgical tradition, its missionary self-understanding, its strength and its needs;
- educating experts for an ecumenical information service on new religious movements and non-christian sects;
- bringing together a delegation of Orthodox experts and bishops to talk to some leaders of Evangelical para-church organisations and right-wing Evangelicalism in the US;
- strengthening those who are ecumenically-minded, both within the Evangelical movement and within the Orthodox churches.

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