

and lifted up the lowly;
He has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty.
He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy

According to the promise he has made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to his descendants forever. (Lk 1:51-55)

Indeed, to such a God is precisely what our world looks for, seeks for and yearns for!

From such a picture of a suffering God, we draw a directive for our participation in the vision for the world. If our Lord and Savior suffered, and continues to suffer, in order to draw all people towards him, then we, his followers can anticipate no less in fulfilling the divine mandate to disciple all nations. From the viewpoint of St John's gospel, this giving of life to others can only be attained by suffering and dying. In John 12:21-22 we read of some Greeks who wished to see Jesus.

According to the tradition of Syrian Christians, these Greeks were the representatives of King Abgar of Edessa, who had heard of the Jewish persecution of Jesus and had despatched his emissaries with the promise of a safe haven.² It was supposedly to this offer Jesus replies: "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit (Jn 12:24). Surely, if Christ draws the whole world to himself through the Cross, then we cannot but accept such a sacrificial surrender of our lives in the quest to win others. Christians must not only plead, but also *bleed* for others!

How wonderful a witness we would offer to others if Christian brothers and sisters, instead of confronting each other in winning souls for Christ, could suffer for each other! Would it not be a testimony of genuine Christian love if Orthodox and Evangelicals could suffer together to make common cause of witnessing to others (cf. Phil 1:15-18) in Russia? Should not Catholics, Protestants and Orthodox bleed together to save the lost in Eastern Europe? Only by this will others be convinced that we are truly the disciples of Christ (Jn 13:15).

We could very well learn a salutary lesson from how a pearl is formed. An oyster's smooth and soft interior is irritated by a small grain of sand, the residue from its straining the water for its food. But instead of expending its energy in expelling it, the oyster begins to coat the grain with a milky substance called nacre. As this nacre congeals, it makes the grain of sand less irritating. Over a period of years, this process continues, with the grain of sand now having expanded into a solid. One fine day a lucky fisherman pries open the oyster to discover a lustrous and beautiful pearl, a source of immense joy to all who behold and wear it! Even

²Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 1:13.

so will our sufferings for each other transform the evil of this world into good and enable us to lead all people to experience authentic life?

What is the final scene St John's vision gives us? It is the glorious picture of God dwelling in the midst of his people (Rev 22:3-4, cf. also 21:3-4). For the Seer, heaven became a reality wherever God was present. And this was a concept he shared with other prophets, stretching all the way back to the Old Testament, the long cherished desire of all humankind to experience this heaven, to live eternally with God. Wasn't this, after all, the experience of the first parents in the Garden of Eden, and experience which the fourth evangelist describes as the Word becoming flesh and dwelling permanently in our midst (Jn 1:14)?

The Jews had a rider for the realization of this heavenly experience. They believed that the Messiah would appear only when the people had repented and were prepared. It is for this reason that Mark has Jesus appear for baptism only after "all the country of Judea, and all the people of Jerusalem" (Mk 1:5) repented, confessed their sins and had been baptized.

We cannot expect God to appear in our midst, to bring about heaven here, as long as our brothers and sisters continue to languish in darkness and unauthentic life. This is the commission that Christ himself gave us (Mt 28:19-20), a command and not an option! If they are not brought to Christ, darkness still prevails here and the permanent dwelling of God as a heavenly experience for all remains deferred. Only in all humankind enjoying this vision does Christianity fulfill its destiny.

But then this goal will continue to be elusive as long as we remain estranged brothers and sisters in this common enterprise. As long as we continue to fruitlessly perdure in our private (read solely denominational) vision, in expending our resources and assets in selfish gains at the expense of other sister churches, we perpetuate this condition.

Let us, therefore, suffer for each other, embrace each other in self-sacrificial Christian love in order to realize this vision St John portrays in Revelation. For as Benjamin Franklin, the indomitable advocate of American Freedom observed: "assuredly, gentlemen, if we do not hang together, we shall surely hang separately!"

I conclude this mediation with the prayer of St Francis of Assisi which can become our creed for our future Christian witness to the world:

Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace,
Where there is hate, let me sow Your love;
Where there is injury, Your pardon;
Where there is doubt, Faith
Where there is despair, Hope
Where there is darkness, Light
And where there is sadness, Joy.
O Divine Master, grant that I may seek

rather to comfort than to be comforted,
To understand rather than to be understood
To love than to be loved.
For it is in giving that one receives, by forgiving that one is forgiven,
and by dying that one is born to eternal life.

***Turn to God - Rejoice in Hope!
The joyful Cry
of a Witnessing
Eucharistic Community***

Prof. Petros Vassiliadis

I have been invited to this second consultation between Orthodox and Evangelicals with the request to provide an Orthodox reflection on the christian¹ imperative of mission, with some bearing upon the assembly theme of the WCC. Before I start let me share with you a few preliminary remarks:

(i) By *Orthodox reflection* I do not mean a strictly *confessional* point of view, but what I consider, out of my ecclesial (i.e. liturgical) and evangelistic (i.e. *martyria*) experience, the understanding of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church's approach to mission should be.

(ii) The views, therefore, which are expressed in this paper do not and cannot claim to be *the* (i.e. official) Orthodox understanding, but *a* personal one. This is quite obvious for both historical and theological reasons. For the former, because of the various secular contexts within which Orthodox communities scattered around the world (established/metropolitan Churches; diaspora and/or *Western* Orthodox Churches; new/*missionary* Churches; Churches suffered during the past generations, because of lack of liberty; *traditional* Orthodox Churches) give their witness and make their special approaches to mission. For the latter, because in our Eastern tradition, generally acknowledged as the more consistent in the Trinitarian (i.e. pneumatological) understanding of the Church, we firmly believe in the diversity of the charismata of the Holy Spirit.

¹ Throughout this paper I have deliberately used small "c" in writing *christian, christianity* etc. and capital "C" in writing *Church*. The reader will understand my decision in the course of reading it. Only one comment must be made in advance: the term Church is always understood in its *ecclesial*, not its *institutional* meaning.

(iii) After their first joyful consultation and the ensuing discussion in Alexandria, Egypt (July 1995), which resulted in an extremely significant message underlining their shared convictions, Orthodox and Evangelicals should now take the risk and enter into a more candid and open dialogue elaborating more their theological characteristics, not only in order to find "effective mechanisms for cooperation in common witness,"² but also in order to come to a closer *koinonia*, which is the ultimate purpose of mission.³ After all, the mandate of that first encounter between Evangelicals and Orthodox was to further work on areas of continued tension, such as divergent ecclesiologies, sacraments etc.⁴ I, therefore, propose to tackle the problem of our christian understanding of mission, with a particular reference to the WCC assembly theme, from a point of view, on which Orthodox and Evangelicals find most of their differences: i.e. *the eucharist*.

The Missiological Parameters

In a theological encounter between Evangelicals and Orthodox like this, one should be reminded of the variety of terms and notions involved in current ecumenical and missiological discussions, expressed by such words as *mission*, *conversion*, *evangelization*, *christianization*, *evangelism*, *witness* or *martyria*. Of these terms only the last two are the most characteristic to the Orthodox, also adopted in ecumenical circles⁵ as the more appropriate for a genuine and authentic christian mission⁶, whereas the imperative validity of all the other have been

² cf. Huibert van Beek-Georges Lemopoulos (ed.), *Proclaiming Christ Today. Orthodox-Evangelical Consultation Alexandria, 10-15 July 1995*, WCC and Syndesmos, 1995, p.15.

³ It is quite important to recall what Georges Florovsky, a leading Orthodox ecumenist, said 50 years ago in the 1st General Assembly of WCC in Amsterdam, on the occasion of the establishment of WCC: "It is not enough to be moved towards ecumenical reconciliation by some sort of strategy, be it missionary, evangelistic, social or other, unless the Christian conscience has already become aware of the greater challenge, by the Divine challenge itself. We must seek unity or reunion not because it might make us more efficient or better equipped...but because unity is the Divine imperative, the Divine purpose and design, because it belongs to the very essence of Christianity".

⁴ *Proclaiming Christ Today*, pp.14f.

⁵ cf. also the change of the relevant WCC missionary commission of Unit II from "Life, Education, and Mission" (1991) to "Life, Education, and Witness" (1994). More on this in M.R. Spindler, *The Missionary Movement and Missionary Organizations*, F.J. Verstraelen et alia (eds.), *Missiology. An Ecumenical Introduction*, W.B.Eerdmans, Michigan 1995, pp.458-466.

⁶ cf. the most important documents and books on the issue: e.g. *Common Witness. A Joint Document of the Working Group of the Roman Catholic Church and the WCC*, WCC Mission Series, Geneva 1982; the relevant to our subject document *Common Witness and Proselytism*; also I. Bria (ed.), *Martyria-Mission*, WCC: Geneva, 1980. Even the *Mission and Evangelism-An Ecumenical Affirmation*, Geneva 1982, WCC Mission Series, 1985, is an attempt to correctly interpret the classical missionary terminology. Cf. also the most recent agreed statement of the Dorfweil/Germany Consultation of the Conference of European Churches (CEC) with the European Baptist Federation and the European Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization (12-13 June 1995) with the title: "Aspects of Mission and Evangelization in Europe Today".

retained as the *sine qua non* of the christian identity of those belonging to the evangelical stream of our christian tradition.⁷ Martin Goodman has discerned four different uses of the word *mission* in modern scholarship of the history of religions, and consequently four different understandings of what has come to be labeled as "christian mission":

(i) The *informative mission*. Missionaries of this type feel "that they had a general message which they wished to impart to others. Such disseminators of information may have had no clear idea of the reaction they desired from their auditors... (The aim of this attitude) was to tell people something, rather than to change their behaviour or status." Of this type was the mission of the first evangelist women who announced the good news of Christ's resurrection, the prime event of the Christian faith.

(ii) The *educational mission*. "Some missionaries did intend to change recipients of their message by making them more moral or contented... Such a mission to educate is easily distinguished from a desire to win converts." The first monastics, no matter out of what motivation they began their movement, exercised this type of mission.

(iii) The *apologetic mission*. "Some missionaries requested recognition by others of the power of a particular divinity without expecting their audience to devote themselves to his or her worship. Such a mission was essentially apologetic. Its aim was to protect the cult and beliefs of the missionary." Obviously, the early christian apologists belonged to this type of missionaries. Finally,

(iv) The *proselytizing mission*. According to Goodman, "information, education, and apologetic might or might not coexist within any one religious system, but all three can individually be distinguished from what may best be described as proselytizing... (the aim of which was) to encourage outsiders not only to change their way of life but also to be incorporated within their group." No doubt, this last type of mission, for which the terms *conversion* and *christianization*" seem to apply better, was the ideal behind the *universal proselytizing mission* of modern times. The origins of this type of mission can be traced back to St Paul (though in scholarly circles this is still debated), and to the dominical saying recorded in St Matthew's Gospel (28:18b-20).⁸ This pluralistic understanding of christian mission in the history of the early Church, apostolic and

⁷ I am just referring here to the tension in the recent history of the world christian mission, which resulted in the tragic separation and the eventual formation of the Lausanne Movement for World Evangelization.

⁸ M. Goodman, *Mission and Conversion. Proselytizing in the Religious History of the Roman Empire*, Oxford, 1994, pp.3ff.

post-apostolic alike,⁹ has undoubtedly given way more or less to a *universalistic* understanding, a universal proselytizing mission, which during the Constantinian period became dominant through its theological validation by the great Church historian Eusebius. However, it never became entirely dormant in the undivided Church, at least in the Eastern Orthodox Church.

Whether this understanding of universal proselytizing mission is to be explained on theological grounds, i.e. as a straightforward result of the high Christology of the early christian (pauline) recapitulation-in-Christ theory, or on grounds of cultural anthropology, i.e. as a legitimate demand within the Roman empire after Constantine the Great of the ideal of "uniformity within a given society", will not concern us here. It will suffice to note that the eventual christianization of the Roman empire had inevitably a significant effect on the future of our Western world, and to a considerable degree it has also determined the shaping in later times of the Western theology of mission, Catholic and Protestant alike. The issue of a universal proselytizing mission in Western christianity, in fact, was given fresh life by the discovery of the New World, and by the prospect of christianizing the entire inhabited earth. It reached its peak with the African and Asian missions during the last century. This concept of *Christendom*, however, carried with it other non-christian elements to such an extent that eventually industrialized development in Europe and America of the bourgeois society as well as colonialism walked hand in hand with Christian mission.

Konrad Raiser in his fascinating book *Ecumenism in Transition. A Paradigm Shift in the Ecumenical Movement*, has rightly underlined that Christians within the "old ecumenical paradigm" felt that they were called to convey to the rest of humanity the blessings of Western (i.e. bourgeois) Christian civilization... The slogan "the evangelization of the world in this generation" emphasizes the missionary consciousness of this early movement, in which genuine missionary and evangelistic motives were inextricably combined with cultural and social motives.¹⁰

Raiser, however, suggested for the future of ecumenism and of christian mission a radical shift to a "new paradigm," away from the "Christocentric universalism" and towards a "Trinitarian" understanding of the divine reality and towards an *Oikoumene* as the one household of life.¹¹ For the understanding of mission, this means the abandonment of any effort of proselytizing, not only among Christians

⁹ cf. also D.Senior-C.Stuhlmueller, who concluded their presentation of biblical evidence with the following four "modalities of mission": (a) direct proclamation, (b) prophetic challenge in word and sign, (c) witness on behalf of the gospel, and (d) mission as personal and social transformation (pp.332ff).

¹⁰ K.Raiser, *Ecumenism in Transition. A Paradigm Shift in the Ecumenical Movement*, WCC Publications Geneva 1991 (translated with modifications from the German original *Oekumene im Uebergang*, C.Kaiser Verlag Muenchen 1989), p.34.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp.79ff.

of other denominations, but even among peoples of other religions. *Dialogue* is the new term which now runs parallel to, and in some cases in place of, the old missiological terminology.¹²

This development, of course, does not by any means imply that there has been a shift in Christian soteriology from the slogan "No salvation but through Christ"¹³ -- overcoming the classical Catholic view *extra ecclesiam salus non est*, first expressed by Cyprian of Carthage and later misinterpreted to exclusively meaning the *institutional* (Catholic?) Church -- to a novel one "No salvation but through God".¹⁴ Rather it is a radical re-interpretation of Christology through Pneumatology,¹⁵ through the rediscovery of the forgotten Trinitarian theology¹⁶ of the undivided Church.

In ecumenical circles, therefore, the understanding of mission on theological grounds is moving away from the "universal proselytizing mission" concept. And this is not in opposition to the "faith mission" principle of the Evangelicals; nor was it due to the failure to convert the entire inhabited world, or to the disillusion and disappointment caused by the end of the China mission, the most ambitious missionary enterprise in modern Christian missionary history. It was rather the rediscovery of the authentic identity of the Church through the invaluable help of the theological treasures of Orthodoxy. More particularly it was the result of the reinforcement of Pneumatology into the ecumenical reflections.¹⁷

The Christological Background of the Understanding of Mission

Nevertheless, this Trinitarian or Pneumatological dimension of the Orthodox understanding of mission should never be detached from its biblical foundation and its deep Christological undergirding. Any *Pneumatomonistic* understanding of mission would be equally disastrous as the previous

¹² For an early survey by an Orthodox see (Archbishop of Albania) Anastasios Yannoulatos, *Various Christian Approaches to the Other Religions (A Historical Outline)*, Athens 1971.

¹³ This comes from the famous passage in Acts 4:12 "And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

¹⁴ For the relation of mission to dialogue, as well as the repeatedly expressed concern over "syncretism" see K. Raiser, *Ecumenism in Transition*, pp. 55ff; also the partisan work from the "old paradigm" by W.A. Visser't Hooft, *No Other Name: The Choice between Syncretism and Christian Universalism*, SCM London, 1963. Also L. Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society*, Geneva, WCC Publications 1989.

¹⁵ Cf. (Metropolitan of Pergamon) John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion*, SVS Press, New York, 1985.

¹⁶ Cf. the extensive use of the doctrine of Trinity even among Pentecostals in Miroslav Volf's, *In His Likeness*, 1997. Also A.I.C. Herton (ed.), *The Forgotten Trinity*, London, 1991; and L. Boff, *Trinity and Society*, Eng. transl. Orbis, New York, 1988.

¹⁷ Cf. Metropolitan George Khodr, "Christianity in a Pluralistic World -- The Economy of the Holy Spirit," *Ecumenical Review* 23 (1971), pp. 118-28.

Christomonistic missiological paradigm. And this was something that was experienced in Vancouver, and was clearly opposed by both the Orthodox and the Evangelicals.

On my part, I have come to the conclusion that any understanding of mission, if it is to be accepted within normative Christianity, has undoubtedly to stem and be determined by the teaching, life and work of Christ. His teaching, nevertheless, and especially his life and work, cannot be properly understood without reference to the eschatological expectations of Judaism. Without entering into the complexities of Jewish eschatology, we can very briefly say, that this eschatology was interwoven with the idea of the coming of a Messiah, who in the "last days" of history (*the eschaton*) would establish his kingdom by calling the dispersed and afflicted people of God into one place to become one body united around him. The statement in the Gospel of John about the Messiah's role is extremely important. There the writer interprets the words of the Jewish high priest by affirming that "he prophesied that Jesus should die... not for the nation only but to *gather into one* the children of God who are scattered abroad" (11:51-52).¹⁸

Throughout the gospels Christ identifies himself with this Messiah. We see this in the various messianic titles he chose for himself, or at least as witnessed by the most primitive christian tradition ("Son of man", "Son of God", etc., most of which had a collective meaning, whence the Christology of "corporate personality"). We see it as well in the parables of the kingdom, which summarize his teaching, proclaiming that his coming initiates the new world of the kingdom of God, in the Lord's Prayer, but also in his conscious acts (e.g. the selection of the twelve, etc.). In short, Christ identified himself with the messiah of the eschaton who would be the centre of the gathering of the dispersed people of God.

It was on this radical eschatological teaching of the historical Jesus about the kingdom of God (which as modern biblical research has shown moves dialectically between the *already* and the *not yet*; in other words, begins already in the present but will be completed in its final authentic form in the eschaton) that the early Church has developed its ecclesiology, on which its missionary practice was based. That is why all members of the christian community are called holy; because they belonged to that chosen race of the people of God. That is why they were considered royal priesthood; because all of them, without exception (not just some special cast such as the priests or Levites) have priestly and spiritual authority to practise in the diaspora the work of the priestly class, reminded at the

¹⁸The idea of "gathering into one place the scattered people of God" is also to be found in Isa 66:18; Mat 25:32; Rom 12:16; Didache 9:4b; Mart. Polyc. 22:3b; Clemens of Rome, 1 Cor 12:6, etc.

same time to be worthy of their election through their exemplary life and works.¹⁹ That is why they were called to walk towards unity ("so that they may become perfectly one", Jn 17:23), to abandon all deeds of darkness; because the one who called them out of darkness into light, "from non existence into being," who took them as non-members of the people of God and made them into genuine members of the new eschatological community²⁰ is holy and perfect (cf. Jn 17:19; also Mt 5:48 par.).

In the first two decades after Pentecost the Christian community understood its existence as the perfect and genuine expression of the people of God. With a series of terms taken from the Old Testament the early Christian community believed that it was the "Israel of God" (Gal 6:16), the "saints" (Acts 9:32, 41; 26:10; Rom 1:7; 8:27; 12:13; 15:25), "the elect" (Rom 8:33; Col 3:12 etc), "the chosen race" (1 Pet 2:9), "the royal priesthood" (ibid) etc; namely the holy people of God (*laos tou theou*), for whom all the promises of the Bible were to be fulfilled at the *eschata*. During this constructive period the concept in which the early Church understood herself was that of a *people* and not of an organization. An examination of both the Old and the New Testament terminology makes this quite clear. The chosen people of God were an *Óam* (in Hebrew, especially in the Prophets) or a *laos* (in Greek), whereas the people of the outside world were designated by the Hebrew term *goim* and the Greek one *ethne* (cf. Acts 15:14).

This consciousness that when God created a new community, he created a people, distinguished the christian Church from those guilds, clubs or religious societies so typical of the Greco-Roman period. It is quite significant that the first Christian community used the term *ekklesia* in the Old Testament meaning; it is not accidental that this term (*ekklesia*) in the Septuagint, corresponds to the Hebrew *qahal*, i.e. to a term denoting the congregation of God's people. The Septuagint never translates by *ekklesia* the Hebrew *Óedhah*, the usual translation of which is *synagogue*. In this primitive period, therefore, the members of the christian community do not just *belong to* the Church; i.e. they are not simply members of an organization; *they are* the Church.

The second generation after Pentecost is certainly characterized by the great theological contribution of St Paul. The apostle takes over the above charismatic notion of the Church, but he gives it in addition a universal and ecumenical character. To the Church belong all human beings, Jews and Gentiles; for the latter have been joined to the same tree of the people of God (Rom 11:13ff).

¹⁹ J.H.Elliott, *The Elect and the Holy*, 1966, has redetermined on the part of the Protestant biblical theology the real meaning of the term "royal priesthood," which has been so vigorously discussed since the time of Luther. Cf. R.Brown, *Priest and Bishop: Biblical Reflections*, 1971.

²⁰ Cf. 1 Pet 2:10: "Once you were no people, now you are God's people."

The Church, as the new Israel, is thus no longer constituted on grounds of external criteria (circumcision etc.), but of its faith in Jesus Christ (cf. Rom 9:6). The term, however, with which St Paul reminds the reader of the charismatic understanding of the Church is *body of Christ*. With this metaphorical expression St Paul was able to express the charismatic nature of the Church by means of the Semitic concept of corporate personality. He emphasised that in the Church there exists a variety of gifts, charisms exercised by the individual members of the community, and necessary for the building up and the nutrition of this body, Christ alone being its only head and authority.

The Johannine figure of the vine (Jn 15:1-8) is equally impressive. As with the Pauline term *soma*, the double scheme vine-branches indicates the special relationship existing between people and Christ, which reveals the inner basis of ecclesial life. The other NT figures for the Church, "household of faith" (Eph 2:11ff), "fellowship" (1 Cor 1:9 etc), "bride of Christ" (Eph 1:31f; Rev 21:9), "little flock" (Lk 12:32 etc), "family of Christ", *oikos* etc., all point in the same direction: namely that the new community is a *people*, bound together by love and the Spirit provided by God in Christ, and not by external structure.

St Paul in particular was absolutely convinced that all who have believed in Christ have been incorporated into his body through baptism, completing with the eucharist their incorporation into the one people of God. The fourth gospel develops this radical eschatological teaching even further in regard to the unity of the people of God around Christ and their incorporation into Christ's body through the eucharist above all. The main contribution of the early Church, as it is recorded in the NT, emphasized and underlined most sharply by St Luke, was that with Christ's resurrection and especially with Pentecost the *eschaton* had already entered history, and that the messianic eschatological community becomes a reality each time the Church, the new Israel, the dispersed people of God, gathers *epi to auto* (in one place), especially when it gathers to celebrate the holy eucharist. This development is undoubtedly the starting point of christian mission, the springboard of the Church's witnessing *exodus* to the world, which in fact interpreted the imminent expectation of the *parousia* in a dynamic and radical way.

The missiological imperatives of the early Church stem exactly from this awareness of the Church, as being an eschatological, dynamic, radical, and corporate reality, obliged to witness the kingdom of God "on earth as it is in heaven" (Mat 6:10 par).²¹ The apostles were commissioned to proclaim not a set of given religious convictions, doctrines, moral commands etc., but the coming kingdom, the gospel, i.e. the good news of a new eschatological reality, which had

²¹ cf. St Chrysostom's comment on the relevant petition of the Lord's Prayer: "(Christ) did not say 'Your will be done' in me, or in us, but everywhere on earth, so that error may be destroyed, and truth implanted, and all wickedness cast out, and virtue return, and no difference in this respect be henceforth between heaven and earth". (PG 57 col. 280).

as its centre the crucified and resurrected Christ, the incarnate Logos of God and his permanent dwelling among us human beings, through the continuous presence of the Holy Spirit. In other words, their primary witness was a life of communion, experienced in their *eucharistic* (in the wider sense) life.

The Eucharistic Dimension: The Basic Approach of Orthodox Mission?

The late D.J. Bosch in his book *Transforming Mission. Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, has ended his chapter on the mission paradigm of the Eastern Orthodox Church with the following statement:

The Church adapted to the existing world order, resulting in Church and Society penetrating and permeating each other. The role of religion - any religion - in society is that of both stabilizer and emancipator; it is both mythical and messianic. In the Eastern tradition the Church tended to express the former of each of these pairs rather than the latter. The emphasis was on conservation and restoration, rather than on embarking on a journey into the unknown. The key words were "tradition", "orthodoxy", and the "Fathers" (Küng), and the Church became the bulwark of right doctrine. Orthodox Churches tended to become ingrown, excessively nationalistic, and without a concern for those outside (Anastasios Yannoulatos). In particular, Platonic categories of thought all but destroyed primitive Christian eschatology (Beker). The Church established itself in the world as an institute of almost exclusively other-worldly salvation.²²

This assessment of the Eastern Orthodox Church was actually reinforced by the first Orthodox, mostly immigrants from the pre-revolution Russia, who came in contact with the West, and in their desperate attempt to preserve their Orthodox identity in a quite alien world to them and present it to their fellow Christians in the West, underlined the *mystical* aspect of the Orthodox theology. This is notably the case with V. Lossky, who in his monumental work under the title *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* has almost determined the character of the Orthodox understanding of mission.²³ Today this one-sided (i.e. mystical) presentation is being questioned by various quarters, the latest being Ion Bria, who rejoices in the existence of a variety of trends -- sometimes even contradictory -- within modern Orthodox theology.²⁴ With regard to the Orthodox understanding of mission, Bria himself underlined the *trinitarian dimension of mission*:

²² D.J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission. Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, 1991, pp.212-213.

²³ V. Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 1957.

²⁴ I. Bria, *The Sense of Ecumenical Tradition. The Ecumenical Witness and Vision of the Orthodox*, Geneva WCC Publications 1991, p. 2.

Trinitarian theology points to the fact that God is in God's own self a life of communion and that God's involvement in history aims at drawing humanity and creation in general into this communion with God's very life. The implications of this assertion for understanding mission are very important: mission does not aim primarily at the propagation or transmission of intellectual convictions, doctrines, moral commands, etc., but at the transmission of the life of communion, that exists in God.²⁵

This trinitarian approach seems to prevail among almost all Orthodox in recent times.²⁶ One of the most serious contributions of modern Orthodox theology was the reintroduction into current theological thinking of the importance for all aspects of theology of the Trinitarian dogma of the undivided Church.

Nevertheless, despite the fact that the trinitarian approach is widely recognized, and more and more applied even by non Orthodox²⁷ in dealing with current theological issues, I decided to approach the assembly theme from the *eucharistic* perspective. I came to this decision not so much in order to avoid a strictly contextual approach.²⁸ It is purely for *methodological* reasons that I consider it not only as much more appropriate to Orthodox, but also as more logical. It is time, I think, to distance ourselves as much as possible from the dominant to modern scholarship syndrome of the priority of the texts over the experience, of theology over ecclesiology. There are many scholars who cling to the dogma, imposed by the post-Enlightenment and post-Reformation hegemony over all scholarly theological outlook (and not only in the field of biblical scholarship or of Protestant theology), which can be summarized as follows: what

²⁵ I. Bria (ed.), *Go fourth in Peace*, Geneva WCC Publications 1986, p. 3.

²⁶ cf. e.g. the application of the trinitarian theology to the *structure* of the Church. By nature the Church cannot reflect the worldly image of secular organizations, which is based on power and domination, but the kenotic image of the Holy Trinity, which is based on love and communion. If one takes a little further this trinitarian approach and takes into consideration the distinction of the hypostases (persons) within the Holy Trinity, one can come to the conclusion that the Church is a Church of "God" (the father) before it becomes a Church of "Christ" and of a certain place. In Eucharistic Liturgy all the proper eucharistic prayers are addressed to God. This has revealing implications also on a number of issues ranging from the profound meaning of episcopacy (Bishop= image of "Christ?") to the dialectics between Christ-Church, divine-human, unity of man and woman, etc.

²⁷ K. Raiser's *Ecumenism in Transition* is a perfect example of a well documented argumentation for the necessity, and to our view also for the right use, of the trinitarian theology to address current burning issues in modern theology. Cf. also sister Elizabeth A. Johnson's *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse*, 1992, especially ch. 10 under the title "Triune God: Mystery of Revelation", pp. 191ff.

²⁸ A serious attempt to approach the problem of contextual theology has been undertaken by my faculty (Department of Theology of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece), which organized in Thessaloniki (2-3 October 1992) jointly with the Ecumenical Institute of Bossey a theological symposium on the theme: "Classical and Contextual Theology. The Task of Orthodox Theology in the post-Canberra Ecumenical Movement". The papers in Greek translation have been published in the journal *Kath' Odon* 4 (1993) pp. 3ff. My keynote paper in a shortened form appeared also in *Oekumenische Rundschau* 41 (1993) 452-460; for its original form ("Orthodoxy and Contextual Theology") see also in my *Lex Orandi. Studies of Liturgical Theology*, 1994, pp. 139-156 (in Greek).

constitutes the core of our christian faith, cannot be extracted but from the expressed theological views, from a certain *depositum fidei*, (hence the final authority of the Bible according to the Evangelicals, or of the Fathers, the canons and certain decisions of the Councils according to the Orthodox, etc.); very rarely is there any serious reference to the eucharistic communion event that has been responsible and produced these views.

It is my firm conviction that out of the three main characteristics that generally constitute the Orthodox theology, namely its *eucharistic*, *trinitarian*, and *hesychastic* dimension, only the first one can bear a universal and ecumenical significance. If the last dimension and important feature marks a decisive development in Eastern christian theology and spirituality after the eventual schism between East and West, a development that has determined, together with other factors, the mission of the Orthodox Church in recent history; and if the trinitarian dimension constitutes the supreme expression of Christian theology, ever produced by human thought in its attempt to grasp the mystery of God, after Christianity's dynamic encounter with the Greek culture; it was, nevertheless, only because of the eucharistic experience, the matrix of all theology and spirituality of our Church, that all theological and spiritual climaxes in our Church have been actually achieved.

It is almost an assured result of modern theological scholarship (biblical and liturgical) that the eucharist was *lived* in the early christian community not as a mystery cult, but as a foretaste of the coming kingdom of God, a proleptic manifestation within the tragic realities of history of an authentic life of communion, unity, justice and equality, with no practical differentiation (soteriological and beyond) between Jews and gentiles, slaves and free men, women and men (cf. Gal 3:28). This was, after all, the real meaning of the Johannine term "eternal life," and St Ignatius' expression "medicine of immortality." According to some historians, the Church was able a few generations later, with the important contribution of the Greek Fathers of the golden age, to come up with the doctrine of Trinity, and much later to further develop the important distinction between substance and energies, only because of the eschatological experience of *koinonia* in the eucharist (both vertical with its head, and horizontal among the people of God, and by extension with the whole of humanity through the Church's mission) of the early christian community, an experience which ever since continues to constitute the only expression of the Church's self-consciousness, its mystery *par excellence*.

No one, of course, can deny that early enough in the history of the christian community, even from the time of St Paul, there has been a "paradigm shift" in the understanding of this act (eucharist) of self-consciousness of community as a *koinonia* of the *eschata* and as a proleptic manifestation of the coming kingdom of God. No matter for what missionary reasons, there has been a shift of the centre of gravity from the (*eucharistic*) *experience* to the (*christian*) *message*, from

eschatology to christology (and further and consequently to soteriology), from the event (the kingdom of God), to the bearer and centre of this event (Christ, and more precisely his sacrifice on the cross).²⁹ However, the eucharist (*theia koinonia*) has always remained (with the exception perhaps of some marginal cases in later Church history) the sole expression of the Church's identity. And it is to the merits of modern theologians from all christian traditions, and most recently of Metropolitan of Pergamon John Zizioulas,³⁰ who reaffirmed the importance of the *koinonia* dimension of the eucharist, stressing that not only the identity of the Church, but all its expressions (structure, authority, mission etc.) are in fact relational.³¹

In sum, if one wants to approach, and reflect on, any specific issue, like the assembly theme, from the the Orthodox point of view, it is the *eucharistic theology* in its broad sense that should guide one's effort. More precisely, on the one hand should be avoided the temptation to ignore the primary experience, i.e. the ecclesia and its eucharistic eschatological experience, the matrix of all theology, or to put it in socio-(cultural-) anthropological terms the wider "social space", that produced all theological interpretations of this experience; but on the other hand, it would be a methodological fallacy to project later theological interpretations onto this primary eschatological experience.

Towards a Proper Understanding of Eucharist

In a meaningful dialogue with the Evangelicals, one has at least to affirm a proper understanding of eucharist, which can be acceptable to them - at least not rejected by them right from the start. For a proper understanding of the eucharist has always been a stumbling block in christian theology and life; not only during the first steps of the christian community, when the Church had to struggle against a multitude of mystery cults, but also much later when scholastic theology (mostly in the West) has systematized a latent "sacramentalistic" view of *the mystery par excellence* of the one, undivided, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. In vain distinguished theologians of the East (most notably in the case of Cabasilas)

²⁹ Although some theologians consider this second concept, which was mingled with the original biblical/semitic thought, as stemming from Greek philosophers (Stoics and others), it is more than clear that the horizontal-eschatological view was the predominant one in New Testament, the other early Christian writings and the authentic teaching of the Church. The vertical-soteriological view was always understood within the context of the horizontal-eschatological perspective as supplemental and complementary. This is why *the liturgical/eucharistic experience of the early Church is incomprehensible without its social dimension* (see Acts 2:42ff., 1 Cor 11:1ff., Heb 13: 10-16; Justin, *1 Apology* 67; Irenaeus, *Adver. Her.* 18:1, etc.).

³⁰ Cf. his address to the 5th World Conference of Faith and Order "The Church as Communion," T.F. Best-Gassmann (eds.), *On the Way to Fuller Koinonia*, WCC Geneva 1994, 103-111.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 105ff.

attempted to redefine the christian sacramental theology on the basis of the trinitarian theology (i.e. Pneumatology). Seen from a modern theological perspective, this was a desperate attempt to reject certain tendencies which overemphasized the importance of Christology at the expense -- and to the detriment -- of the importance of the role of the Holy Spirit.

The controversy between East and West on the issues of the *filioque*, the *epiclesis* etc., are well known,³² though their consequences to the sacramental theology of the Church have yet to be fully and systematically examined. The tragic consequences of those tendencies were in fact felt a few generations after the final schism between East and West with the further division of Western christianity. One of the main focuses during the Reformation, and rightly so, was the *sacramentalistic* understanding of the eucharist in Western christianity which resulted, among other things, in divergent views between Evangelical and Orthodox theology. The dialectic opposition between *sacramentalism* on the one hand, and *the complete rejection of sacraments* on the other, was the main reason for the tragic secularization of our society and the transformation of the *Church* into a *religion*: in the traditional Churches (some Orthodox included) into a cultic religion, in Evangelical christianity into an exclusively evangelistic one.

In my view, the first serious attempt to reflect upon the profound meaning of the eucharist is to be found in the Bible itself, and in particular in the Gospel of John. There we have the beginnings of what later become axiomatic in christian theology: to have eternal life -- in other words to live in a true and authentic way and not just live a conventional life -- one has to be in *koinonia* (communion) with Christ. Communion with Christ, however, means participation in the perfect communion which exists between the Father and the Son ("Just as the living Father sent me, and I live through the Father, he who eats me will live through me", 6:57), or as the fathers of the Church developed later, participation in the perfect communion which exists within the Holy Trinity.

What we have in John, is in fact a parallel expression to the classic statement of 2 Peter 1:4 ("partakers of the divine nature"), which has become in later patristic literature the biblical foundation of the doctrine of divinization (*theosis*). In the case of the Gospel of John, however, this idea is expressed in a more descriptive and less abstract way than in 2 Peter. If we now take this argument a little further, we can say that Johannine theology more fully develops the earlier interpretation of the eucharist as the continuously repeated act of sealing the "new covenant" of God with his new people. This interpretation is evidenced in both the synoptic and the Pauline tradition, although there the covenantal interpretation of Jesus' death (in the phrase "this is my blood of the covenant", Mk

³² cf. my "Orthodoxy and Ecumenism," in my forthcoming book *Eucharist and Witness*, WCC and Holy Cross Press, 1998.

14:24 par. and 1 Cor 11:25), is somewhat hidden by the soteriological formula "which is shed for you" (ibid.).

What comes out of this biblical understanding of eucharist (with its more direct emphasis on the idea of the covenant, and of *koinonia*) is the transformation of Jeremiah's vision -- which was at the same time also a promise -- from a marginal to a central feature. Just as in the book of Jeremiah, so also in early christianity -- at least in John -- it is the ideas of *a new covenant*, of *communion*, and of the Church as *a people*, that are most strongly emphasized. Listen to what the prophet was saying: "and I will make a covenant... a new covenant" (Jer 38.31); and "I will give them a heart to know that I am the Lord... and they shall be unto me a people" (Jer 24.7).

During this normative period, the eucharist was understood in its *ecclesial* dimension, as a communion event, and not as an act of personal devotion, or even a merely cultic act; in other words, as an expression of the Church as the people of God and as the body of Christ mystically united with its head, and not as a sacramentalist quasi-magical rite.³³ The eucharistic theology of the early Church was beyond any notion related to sacramental practices of the ancient mystery cults. The eucharist as the unique and primary mystery of the Church cannot be related to *sacramentalism*; it is rather a dynamic expression of the communion of the people of God and a proleptic manifestation of the kingdom to come, which in turn is a reflection of the communion that exists between the persons of the Holy Trinity.

"Turn to God - Rejoice in Hope!"

The year 1998, a decisive moment, and possibly a decisive turning-point, in the life of the Churches' ecumenical journey, will also mark the 50th anniversary of the founding of the WCC. No doubt, the theme of the coming assembly of WCC, *Turn to God-Rejoice in Hope*, is an exhortation and challenge to christians and the Churches to proclaim together the christian faith; to bring a message of hope and new life to a broken and deeply divided world. It is a call to obedience, to live out our faith in witness and service in response to the injustice and suffering endured by both humanity and the natural world.

However, it is not a theme which simply explores *hope*, a theme articulated just to encourage the Churches to move away from a focus of their own ghettos,

³³ cf. also J. Zizioulas' affirmation that "when it is understood in its correct and primitive sense -- and not how it has come to be regarded even in Orthodoxy under the influence of Western scholasticism -- the eucharist is first of all an assembly (*synaxis*), a community, a network of relations..." (*Being as Communion. Studies in Personhood and the Church*, New York, SVS Press 1985, p. 60). Cf. also his interesting remark: "the fourth gospel identifies eternal life, i.e. life without death, with truth and knowledge, (which) can be accomplished only if the individualization of nature becomes transformed into communion - that is if communion becomes identical with being. Truth, once again, must be communion if it is to be life" (p. 105).

their organizational and financial difficulties, fears and hesitations, and towards a common quest for visible unity, unity in faith, unity in prayer, unity in life and common witness. It is above all and fundamentally a joyful cry of the christian community, which has experienced in a unique manner the *mirabilia Dei*, a community that in every local eucharistic gathering experiences the divine gift of life, of communion, of unity, of equality, of justice; a community which "having seen the true Light... and having discovered the true faith"³⁴ in the communion event of the proleptic manifestation of the coming kingdom of God, is "sent forth" to the world (Liturgy after the Liturgy)³⁵ to witness this experience in a situation of death, selfish individualism, disunion, inequality, and injustice.

Seen from this eucharistic perspective, the assembly theme can be reflected upon, around the four key-words:

(i) *God*: It was God, who first turned to us human beings in grace, and to him we should respond in faith by acting in love. Our Churches', and every individual's, turning to God is founded upon God's unshakable fidelity. Not our own personal, or our Church's, faithfulness, but God's faithfulness, is the centre of our hope and the source of our life. Indeed God remains faithful, even if we are not faithful; God's faithfulness continues unshakably, despite and against all human unfaithfulness. Turning to him means turning *away* from all kinds of idols, away from certain things far more pervasive and far more seductive than the idols of wood and stone denounced by Isaiah (40:19-20; 44:9-20): from systems of material and social gain which reward greed rather than generosity; from political and economic systems which reward those who already have, at the expense of those who have not;³⁶ from cultural and psychological systems which reward habits of domination and control rather than those of cooperation, sharing and solidarity.³⁷

(ii) *Turn*: To this loving God, who sent his Son to save us and his Spirit of truth, of communion and of reconciliation, as a foretaste (*arrabon*) of the fullness of God's promise (his kingdom), we have to turn; in other words, it is necessary that we undergo a *metanoia*, the only necessary precondition of living in, and witnessing to, this kingdom. The God to whom we turn in *metanoia* is that faithful God who has acted, in creation and throughout history, to establish and maintain God's world and God's people. And our *metanoia* is not only a mental

³⁴ From the Orthodox Divine Liturgy's after-communion-hymn.

³⁵ Ion Bria, "The Liturgy after the Liturgy", in *Martyria-Mission. The Witness of the Orthodox Churches Today*, Geneva: WCC 1980; idem (ed.), *Go Forth in Peace. Perspectives in Mission*, Geneva: WCC 1987; E. Clapsis, "Eucharist as Missionary Event", in G. Lemopoulos (ed.), *Your Will Be Done. Orthodoxy in Mission*, Geneva: WCC 1989, pp.161-171.

³⁶ cf. U. Duchrow, *Europe in the World System 1492-1992: Is Justice Possible?*, Geneva: WCC 1992.

³⁷ cf. the powerful and integral, even from a Western perspective, approach to the theme of the 8th Assembly of WCC by T.F. Best, *Turn to God-Rejoice in Hope!*, Geneva: WCC 1998.

reorientation (in Greek, "changing one's mind=*nous*"); it also demands a revision of our whole self-understanding, affecting every aspect of our lives and all of our relationships. In the Orthodox Divine Liturgy the faithful are urged "to love one another in order to be able to witness with one mind (*en omonoia*) to their faith". In other words, they are commanded to seek to establish justice (*dikaiosyne, zedekah*); to show the same loving kindness (*chesed*) which God has shown to us. Within the eucharistic community this self-emptying love (*kenosis*) is not only an act and obligation of individuals; it also applies to our Churches in their own internal life, stewardship of material resources and exercise of power. A eucharistic *kenosis* means giving away of power -- as Christ did (Phil 2: 6-8) -- to the benefit of others and eventually to the empowerment of others, which in turn leads to an all-inclusive society.

(iii) *Joy*: The joy of the faithful is not a superficial positive feeling, but the foretaste of the eschatological experience of God's kingdom. And the eucharist is above all the mystery of the kingdom of God;³⁸ a kingdom which St Paul was able to identify with "righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom 14:17). From the very first day of the Church's manifestation in history, there is no action more joyful than the eucharist. According to the Lucan report in Acts, the first Christians, day by day, in their eucharistic gatherings at home ("breaking bread in their homes"), "were partaking of food with joy and generous heart" (Acts 2:46). The Church's supreme liturgical rite is joyful, not because we simply remember (cf. *anamnesis*) Jesus' of Nazareth last supper with his disciples, but because we anticipate "his glorious eschatological kingdom".³⁹ It is important that this remembering is not an individualistic or solitary act; it is an active remembering, that takes place within the community's celebration of Christ's gathering of his disciples for a meal -- and of his people for the eucharist. And what is even more important is that this act of *koinonia* is offered not for Christians alone, but for the entire world.

(iv) *Hope*: As with our rejoicing, so also with our hope; it is not by any means a facile optimism. It is our confidence and assured conviction for the kingdom to come, the *inaugurated*, yet not fully revealed, reality and alternative way of life, which we proleptically experience in every eucharistic gathering. After all, as Christians we are called to witness to, and give account for, "the hope that is in us" (1 Pet 3:15), which is actually the quintessence of the gospel. Obviously joy and hope are inextricably linked together. Certainly hope for the future is a source and confirmation of our joy in the present. But above all it is a gift of the Holy Spirit, the sending down of which is undoubtedly a sign of the *eschata*. And

³⁸ cf. A. Schmemmann, *The Eucharist. Sacrament of the Kingdom*, SVS Press, 1988.

³⁹ In an extraordinary way the Orthodox eucharistic prayer (*anaphora*) includes in the *anamnesis* both the saving events of the past and Christ's glorious second coming.

this is what enables St Paul to acclaim: "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope" (Rom 15:13). Hope is, therefore, a product of joy, rooted in the eucharistic experience of believers, who rejoice in receiving the Holy Spirit (*epiclesis*),⁴⁰ and it is for this purpose that they constantly re-enact the Lord's acclamation of "the inbreaking of the year of the Lord's favour (Jubilee, Lk 4:19) moving towards the "release to the captives", the cancellation of debts (cf. the Lord's Prayer: "forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors" Mat 6:12), the release of many persons who are in servitude -- including the financial servitude of debt (cf. Lev 25:39-42), and the release of land from the control of new owners (cf. Lev 25:13-17,25-28).

Conclusions

If I have placed so much emphasis on the Eucharist, and reflected on the assembly theme exclusively from a eucharistic perspective (sometimes even overemphasizing deliberately the differences between Evangelicals and the Orthodox), it is because I firmly believe in a *synthesis* of the two traditions. An authentic witness of the Church must have both the evangelistic zeal and devotion of the Evangelicals and the "costly eucharistic vision" of the Orthodox.⁴¹ A dynamic encounter, therefore, will enrich both traditions.

My intention, however, had deeper theological motivation, because I am convinced that in dealing with the eucharist we are dealing with the *very being* and with the *identity* of the Church. Without this, christianity may well slip (because of external factors and of social dynamics) to an authoritarian and oppressive religious system,⁴² willing to propagate, some times at any cost, only and exclusively its own convictions. I am, of course, well aware that without a profound, renewing, prophetic and theological interpretation, the eucharist can easily become at best a useless typolatry, and at worst a sacramentalistic (for some even demonic) ritual, which instead of directing the Church's mission and the entire life of the christian community towards the vision of the coming kingdom, may lead to individualistic and mystical paths. And this is something which eventually distances the members of the community from the "other" (and therefore from God, the ultimate "Other"), leading them to death, to hell.

⁴⁰ The most important moment in the Orthodox Divine Liturgy is the invocation of the Holy Spirit to come down and transform *first* the worshipping community into a real body of Christ, i.e. to make them partakers of the divine kingdom, with all that this would entail for their social environment.

⁴¹ cf. my Bible study "Towards a Costly Eucharistic Vision", in *Eucharist and Witness*.

⁴² A "costly eucharistic commitment," I must confess, is indeed dangerous for authoritarian mentalities.

The problem of the Church's witness, i.e. the problem of overcoming the evil in the world, is not basically a moral, or even a social issue. It is primarily and even exclusively an ecclesial one. The moral and social responsibility of the Church (both as an institution and also of its individual members), as the primary witnessing acts of the body of Christ, is the logical consequence of their ecclesial self-consciousness. It is, therefore, only by reaffirming the eucharistic identity of the Church through a radical *liturgical renewal* that the Church can bear witness to its fundamental characteristics of *unity* and *catholicity*. Only then can we hope that today's *exclusiveness* will give way to the priority of the *communion with the others*. And only then will our Church definitely and once and for all overcome all kinds of nationalistic and phyletistic behaviour, the worse heresy of our time, thus not only promoting Christian unity, but also actively contributing to the struggle for the unity of humankind.

In terms of mission this will also mean a *common* evangelistic witness. Beyond the biblical references,⁴³ the eucharistic perspective of mission points far beyond denominational boundaries, beyond Christian limitations, even beyond the religious sphere in the conventional sense, and towards the manifestation of the kingdom of God, the restoration of God's "household" in its majestic eschatological splendour.

Through a eucharistic understanding of mission one can expect it to be much easier to overcome (both in society and in the priestly ecclesiastical order) the corrupted hierarchical order, which is a reflection of the fallen earthly order and not of the *kenotic* divine one. This will inevitably result in the proper traditional *iconic* understanding of all priestly ministries, but will also lead to a more authentic *conciliar* status in all sectors of ecclesiastical life (i.e. participation of the entire *laos* to the priestly, royal and prophetic ministry of the Church), to an *inclusive* community (a genuine community of men and women etc.).

Finally, a eucharistic revival will also help the Church to move away from a certain christocentric universalism and towards a trinitarian understanding of the divine reality and of the Church's mission that embraces the entire *oikoumene* as the one household of life. Especially for mission, this means the abandonment of any effort of *proselytism*, not only among Christians of other denominations (which is a caricature of true evangelism), but even among peoples of other religions, among whom the only effective witness is an authentic manifestation of the kingdom of God.

⁴³ cf. Mt 25:31ff., where what seems to really matter is not so much accepting, and believing in, the abundant love of our triune God (confessional, religious exclusiveness), but exemplifying it to the world through an authentic witness (ecclesial inclusiveness).

Turn to God - Rejoice in Hope!

An Evangelical Reflection

Rev. Canon Vinay K. Samuel

Introduction

The theme of turning to God and rejoicing in hope is uttered in 1998. *The World in 1998*, a special publication by the *Economist*, describes how it views 1998. The Editor Dudley Fishburn summarizes the views of the articles in the publication as follows: "1998 will be a year of prosperity. It will see the fastest rate of economic growth in a decade, despite shudders in the global stock markets. Although the year will end with an extra 80 million people, the world by then would have created wealth equivalent to three new Canadas. There will, therefore, be more for all. Since most of the growth will be in Latin America, India and China, it is the world's poor who will benefit most. And since every country's unofficial black economy will do better than its government statistics will show, personal prosperity will flourish... Everywhere there will be peace. No two sovereign nations will be at war with each other. Indeed, the number of people killed in millions conflict will be the lowest in modern history."

And so it goes on. Against such human optimism in the future, at least the immediate future, how does a Christian call people to *Turn to God*? Is God behind that future?

I have spent most of the last four months in India. I did not see the sense of hopelessness that characterized the urban and rural poor twenty five years ago. Instead, while the gap between the rich and poor has widened dramatically, the poor seem less threatened by the future and more willing to improve their situation knowing it is not a hopeless task. Opportunities can be found to improve their condition and more poor strain to find and exploit them. The sophistication of the people voting in the last elections demonstrated their sense of political maturity and desire to influence their future.

Biblical Interpretation of the World

The evangelical recognizes that any interpretation of the condition of the world must be integrally related to the Bible. Evangelical appeal to scripture and supreme authority accepts that the Bible creates the categories through which we interpret all human contexts and all reality. The biblical world is the "symbolic world" representing the human condition and depicting the character of God. Evangelicals love to use Jn 3:16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his only son, that whosoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life."

The character of God as one who loves the world and gives himself in his Son is announced alongside the offer to enable humans to believe and experience the life God promises. This offer is made in the context of a human condition that is perishing.

The call to turn to God for eternal life recognizes that the human condition is one of alienation from God. It is being in a condition of "turned away from God." So while we recognize that the optimism of the *Economist* regarding the future of the world in 1998 and beyond may have sound basis, we also conclude that this world of increasing prosperity is still a world perishing, under God's judgement, turned away from him and in need of turning to him.

Evangelical appeal to biblical authority to interpret the world "authoritatively" has increasingly recognized the role of tradition, reason and experience. With its origins in sola scriptura, evangelicalism has recognized that it reads scriptures under the influence of its own traditions. Evangelicals are noting that tradition is not only local and particular to a church or a group within a denomination with its distinctive forms of belief and practice but must include ancient ecumenical creeds and formularies. Evangelical stress on the reliability of reason is essential as it needs to affirm the intelligibility of the biblical text to human study. Human reason can describe the biblical world and enable us to relate our particular worlds to the biblical one. Experience also becomes a source of authority supporting the normative authority of scripture. Personal experience becomes paradigmatic if it is affirmed by others in the community of faith and conforms to scripture. Such personal experience is showed with conviction and sometimes even authoritatively. Such personal experience is not isolated from the experience of other persons in the community of faith. It is personal not collectivist. The truth of scripture gets confirmed through the testimony of the community of faith.

Turning Away from Sin

The evangelical call to turn to God begins with a call to recognize one's lostness and alienation from God. Against human optimism due to economic growth, peaceful civil society and general confidence in the future, an evangelical

approach stresses the reality of personal and social sin. Each person is implicated in the sin of unbelief, ethical ambiguity and lack of love for neighbor. Every person is judged as already guilty by scripture. Evangelicals begin with this judgement on humankind. They call for personal acknowledgment of this judgement. They encourage persons to recognize that whatever their social, economic and spiritual condition, they are implicated in God's judgement on humankind and must accept their personal guilt. It is only then that a call to turn to God becomes profoundly meaningful.

The call to recognize personal sin and guilt in turning to God is made to persons who are members of communities. Evangelicals recognize that sin is both a personal and social reality, that persons participate in sinful attitudes and acts with others, that communities themselves exhibit and promote sinful attitudes and actions. Evangelicals stress the personal as central to acts of recognition of sin and turning to God in repentance. Again this may be seen as an individualistic and isolated act but it is never meant to be so. Personal is not necessarily individualistic and isolated in a modernistic sense. Personal is to take personal responsibility for sin and alienation in human society, families and individuals. It is in that profound recognition of one's personal responsibility we begin to understand the lostness of the world and its alienation from God's purposes. A human condition that spoils all God's creation, opening it to God's wrath and judgement is the burden of any individual person. The person is called to account and prevented from hiding behind human collectivities often masking that collective in communitarian language. The person must recognize his role and turn to God. This appeal for personal repentance is the particularity of the evangelical perspective. It does get confined to the personal at times. Though in the recent past evangelicals have been as vigorous as others in calling communities to repent of racism, of economic exploitation, etc. Personal repentance continues to be a focus of evangelical concern.

Turning to God

We turn to God because he invites to do so. Turning to God is a response to his call. The God to whom we turn has already identified himself in the testimony of the community of faith through which his call comes.

The community of faith announces God's invitation. Its call is based on the authority of the scriptures and its own experience of the God who invites. God's saving acts witnessed in scripture appropriated in the community of believers provide the confidence to invite persons to turn to God. The call to turn to God is Christ-centered.

The focus on Christ highlights Christ's atoning death and his resurrection. Turning to God is turning to Christ, to the cross, identifying with the atoning death of Christ, experiencing the forgiveness and acceptance that follows such

identification and opening up to the fullness of the Spirit. To be identified with Christ is to be baptized into his death and resurrection. The evangelical stress on personal choice and reception of God's grace sees baptism as a sign of God's response to the personal turning to God. The turning to God of the community of faith is the context in which individuals or in case of infants -- their parents turn to God in repentance and experience the grace of baptism.

The Christ to whom we turn invites us to share in his death and his resurrection. The turning to Christ requires the experience of death to one's past, "Unless a seed falls into the ground and dies it abides alone." Turning to Christ requires a deliberate turning away from the world which is alienated from God. The atoning death of Christ guarantees that turning to him will lead to reconciliation with God and new life in him.

The turning to Christ results in incorporation into a new community -- the people of God. In the gospels and throughout the teaching of Paul it is evident that God's saving acts intend the formation of a people not just the salvation of individuals. The community in which the individual is incorporated is a community of the gospel, brought into being in response to the gospel, shaped by the gospel and living for the gospel. The community is characterized by the breaking down of walls of hostility, an ethic of sharing and a commitment to see that there was no needy person among them.

The turning to Christ affirms that one is now part of the new creation emerging in the world that is passing away. This sense of the new, particularly being part of the new creation results in openness to all that God gives through his Spirit. It is the operation of the Holy Spirit in the lives of those who turn to God that makes them part of the new creation which the Spirit is bringing about in the world. The Holy Spirit is Christ's agent in making all things new. The Spirit renews, transforms and creates anew. Those who turn to God find themselves part of this great movement of the Spirit to make all things new.

Turning to God is a response of penitence and love. It is a response of penitence as we recognize our personal and social complicity in the poverty that still dominates a third of the world's population. It is a response of penitence as we see the growth of child prostitution, street children, child labor and recognize that we have not struggled enough to remove such evils against the most vulnerable of the human family. It is a response of love.

John the Baptist asked his hearers to demonstrate the fruits of repentance. Repentance is visible as much in acts of love for the neighbor as it is in one's self-humiliation at the cross. Responding in love requires solidarity with all those who are in pain, who are excluded from the abundance that God makes available in his creation. Responding in love involves actions of compassion and justice.

Turning to God in the Life of the Church

Some evangelicals consider turning to God as an initial experience when we are incorporated into the community of faith. Subsequently there is little of the sense of penitence in turning to God. It is much more turning to God to bless, heal and prosper. It is here there needs to be growth in the experience of evangelical churches and communities. Turning to God as the community of faith is to embrace the world in which we live and take it with us in our turning to God in penitence. It is in worship when we intercede for the world that we embrace the world, recognize our integration into it and place it before God in tears of intercession. It is in such activities of continual intercession we join the saints in their intercession for the church and the world. It is in such corporate acts of turning to God that we experience the healing, the purification of vision and the empowering for mission we need as God's community of faith.

Rejoice in Hope

The Church as a community of faith is renewed by the Spirit of God. It is the Spirit who enables the Church to rejoice in the experience of God's presence, power and promise and to live by the hope of the future to which he is moving the Church. It is the Spirit's presence which brings joy and hope.

The joy which the believer is enjoined to demonstrate is a joy in all circumstances and in spite of any adverse circumstance. "Rejoice in the Lord always again I say rejoice," says Paul to the Philippians. The early church faced a most active persecution. It was marginal in status and powerless politically. Yet it was not only founded in the knowledge that the new creation has already erupted in history and the church was part of it. The expression of a people who belonged to the new creation was joy at its anticipated fulfillment and its foretaste in the present.

The joy in Christian experience is a fruit of the Spirit's work. The Spirit fills the believer with joy. He enables the Church to rejoice in all circumstances. The Spirit's presence confirms that the promised future will not only come, but is at work in the present. The Spirit is the common ground between the present and the future.

The hope that animates Christian joy and activism is the hope of the kingdom of God. The Church as the Community of Faith anticipates the kingdom, experiences its reality in its life and witnesses to it in acts of mission in the world. The kingdom of God is the kingdom of our Lord. It is Jesus' kingdom. The hope of the Church has a christological focus. While the scope of our hope is the whole of creation -- all things in heaven and earth -- the focus of our hope is the acknowledgment and establishment of Christ's leadership over all. In practice it means the Church must be tireless in its efforts to affirm Christ's Lordship in all

contexts and situations. The church interprets every context not only in the light of the ruling forces at work, but also in the context where Christ is exercising his Lordship. "He is Lord," and his Lordship will be acknowledged by all creation. The church's mission in the world reflects that conviction, not as a triumphalist assertion, but as a faith affirmation that defines the way the Church lives out its life in the world.

The hope of the kingdom of God enabled the New Testament Church to live by the values of the kingdom which often were opposite to the values of contemporary culture. However, the hope of the kingdom is catholic. Its scope is universal.

The Church affirms the universal presence and activity of Christ. So Christ is for all situations, all people and relevant to the whole of humanity. The Church as his body lives out in its life that catholicity. It has particular concern for outsiders as it was an outsider once. However, inclusivism in principle -- is pluralism vastly different from the inclusiveness that comes from Christ's universality? As catholic the Church is also different. Again difference is not itself a value as in post-modern culture. The Church's difference is to celebrate its holiness, its set-apartness for service. Its holiness is to conform its life to the life of Jesus Christ.

The inclusiveness of hope which the Church signifies is a costly inclusiveness. It seeks to embrace all people who experience exclusion. It seeks to reconcile hostile communities of people to each other. Embrace and reconciliation are activities of great risk. The Church risks its life in its hope for the excluded and the hostile.

The hope of the kingdom is a hope of wholeness and healing. In the New Testament, one of the key signs of the kingdom is healing of people from physical and other ailments. The hope of final wholeness of individual, families, communities and nations is experienced as a foretaste in the Church. The Church announces its reality and invites people to taste the healing now. The Spirit's work in the Church and through the Church is also a work of wholeness and healing. The offer of healing to a broken humanity, broken nations, families and persons energizes much of evangelical mission activity today.

Hope and Mission

The Church lives in the hope the kingdom of God. This hope is particularly relevant in its mission in today's world. The driving forces of contemporary society are modernization, the market economy, and the search for identity. The dominance of the market economy and the culture it promotes creates winners and losers. In some contexts a significant percentage of the population find themselves excluded from the opportunities and successes of the market economy. The article quoted in the introduction leaves much of Africa out of

prosperity in 1998. The Church's solidarity with the excluded, its efforts to address that exclusion is to live out its experience of hope for all peoples.

The struggle for national and ethnic identities constructed by the people themselves rejecting received identities imposed by outsiders is a feature of contemporary culture. The experience of the Church as catholic affirms that the Gospel translates into cultures and enables Christ to be experienced in a culture not only as its transformer, but as one who preserves its integrity and uniqueness. Here particular identities do not oppose a universal community. The Church identifies with the aspirations of peoples to recover and renew their culture and to find a new particular identity against homogenizing forces of the market culture. In supporting such recovery and renewal of cultures, the Church also witnesses to the possibility of being part of a universal body which is its own experience as the body of the universal Christ.

Conclusion

I share these reflections on the theme as an evangelical Churchman committed to the authority of Scripture. The evangelicals are "gospel" people. What motivates and shapes evangelicals is the power of the gospel to transform persons and communities. It is that conviction that mobilizes them to invite people to turn to God. It is that conviction that makes them turn to God in anticipation of his intervention. It is also that conviction that enables them to express their confidence in the gospel in their corporate worship pulsating with joy in the Lord.

Orthodox-Evangelical Dialogue A MECC Perspective

Dr George Sabra

I am taking part in this Orthodox-Evangelical Consultation as a representative of the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC), which includes all the Christian traditions or families, as we call them, in that region of the world: the Orthodox, the Catholic and the Protestant or Evangelical. I myself belong to an Evangelical church, though I should hasten to add that *evangelical* in this case is a proper name and is not used in the sense of this consultation. My church, the National Evangelical Church of Beirut, is a congregational church in the Reformed tradition; it is an outcome of western, mainly American, missionary activity in the nineteenth century which was *evangelical* in this consultation's sense of the term. Thus, it was characterized by a strict allegiance to and interpretation of scripture, as well as to an intense personal appropriation of justifying faith in a "born again" experience.¹ I derive from that tradition and many in my church and in other Protestant churches in the Middle East still belong to this *evangelical* tradition which was the inheritor of the pietism and revivalism of the past century. Thus, I am closely related to *evangelicalism*, though spiritually and theologically I am not a typical *evangelical*. But I am also related to Orthodoxy in the sense that my paternal family line was Antiochene Orthodox before my great grandfather converted to the Protestant faith in 1858, exactly 140 years ago. Many of my extended family members are Orthodox, both by blood relations and by marriage, but, more importantly, the most important spiritual and intellectual influence on my life was from my philosophy teacher and mentor who was a deeply believing and practising Greek Orthodox person. I say all of this about myself because I want to place myself for you as one who, while being, strictly speaking, neither *evangelical* nor Orthodox, stands very close to both, is indebted to both, and is therefore deeply interested in their dialogue and cooperation.

¹ I adopt here the broad definition of *evangelical* formulated by G. Fackre, "The Revival of Systematic Theology: An Overview" *Interpretation* 49 (1955), p. 231 f.

One cannot understand the relations between Orthodox and Evangelicals in the Middle East, especially in Syria, Lebanon and Palestine, without knowing something about the nature of the historical relations between these two communities. It is a fact that most of the converts to Protestantism in the Middle East were from the Orthodox churches; for Arab Protestantism in Syria, Lebanon and Palestine, it was a conversion from Greek Orthodoxy. It has also been asserted by one prominent historian, and I concur in his assertion, that the resentment against the Protestants was stronger among the Greek Orthodox than among the other eastern Christian sects.² There are many reasons why most converts came from the Orthodox community and why the resentment was greater there than among the others. In the last century, the Orthodox Church of Antioch was not very well organized; it lacked cohesion; the upper clergy were not Arabs but Greeks, so the priests who took care of the daily affairs were often poorly trained, incompetent, and hardly educated.³ The Catholic churches, both Maronite and Melkite, on the contrary, were much better organized and disciplined. Conversions from their numbers to Protestantism were much less frequent, and if any one converted he or she was not only swiftly excommunicated but socially ostracized as well. Among the Greek Orthodox, if any converted to Protestantism they tended to remain in close contact with their families and larger Orthodox environment. Interaction continued and in many cases there was envy and resentment because the converts usually began to fare better socially, economically and educationally. On the side of the converts there was often a condescending attitude towards their relatives and friends who remained in the old faith.⁴ There are thus historical wounds between the Greek Orthodox and the Protestant communities, and these have grown over the years and are still with us to a certain extent.

The situation today can be seen on two levels. On one level and among the people in general the two communities live side by side in many villages, towns and cities. There is good integration on the social level. The two communities have mixed well; there are many instances of mixed marriages among them. In terms of political affiliation, there can be no distinctions drawn according to their sectarian identity. Orthodox and Protestants take varying positions within the political spectrum. On another level, the ecclesiastical or theological level, there is some tension remaining between the two communities, especially between those involved in the religious and ecclesiastical concerns of their community. The tension and problems increase and decrease depending on the type of Protestant with whom the Orthodox comes in contact, for the Protestants in the Middle East today are two kinds: ecumenical and non- or anti-ecumenical. The mainline and older churches

² K. Salibi, "The Arab Protestant Heritage," *Theological Review* XIII/2 (1992), p. 136.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 137.

are mainly ecumenical, that is, they belong to the founders of the ecumenical movement in the Middle East and are active members in it. These churches are members today in the organization that I am representing here, the Middle East Council of Churches. The relations of these Protestants to the Orthodox churches have improved, and continue to improve, in direct proportion to their commitment to the common ecumenical movement. Problems and tensions still remain, but the overall atmosphere is irenic. There are, however, individuals in those churches who are anti-ecumenical, and there are other Protestant churches and groups in the region which are not part of the ecumenical movement, and these are mainly *evangelical* in their orientation. Between these and the Orthodox churches of all kinds there exists great tension whose sources are both theological and theologico-political.

The source of the theological tension is viewed differently by the two groups. For the Orthodox, the anti-ecumenical Evangelicals are a western phenomenon that has no legitimate ecclesial place in the Middle East. They are constantly accused of practising proselytism in the most derogatory sense of the word. For the evangelically-oriented Christians, the Orthodox in general, along with most Eastern Christians, are only nominally Christian; they call themselves Christian, but they are not really so. Thus, they are in need of evangelizing.

The source of the theologico-political tension is twofold: first, it manifests itself among some of the western Evangelical churches and groups who come to the Middle East and who espouse a millennialist eschatology or some sort of "Israel" theology which carries with it a theological justification for the existence of the modern State of Israel, and is therefore insensitive to the plight of the Palestinian Arabs, both Christian and Muslim. This attitude, and the practice attached to it, results in great tension and is actually very detrimental to all of Eastern Christianity, not just to the Orthodox form of it. It is not only insensitive to matters of justice and rights, but it is also most dangerous for the credibility of Middle Eastern Christians living with and among their Muslim co-citizens. Second, some of the anti-ecumenical evangelicals espouse an aggressive and old-style missionary approach towards Muslims which ends up by antagonizing Muslims and causing the fanatics among them to turn against all sorts of Christians, for the majority of Muslims do not distinguish between this and that type of Christian.

This is how I see the situation today. I believe that the Middle East Council of Churches can and should play a role in lessening the tension and furthering the dialogue and cooperation of the various Christians living in that region. Indeed the Middle East Council of Churches has begun to do so. A dialogue has been going on with some American Evangelical churches and organizations concerning the problems I have mentioned earlier. There is more understanding on both sides, but the participants in the dialogue do not yet include all those who ought to be included. In view of the most pressing problem facing Middle Eastern Christians as a whole today, namely, the question of continued presence in that region of the

world, I believe it most important to work on all fronts for the closer cooperation and deeper dialogue between Evangelicals and Orthodox. There is no future for Middle Eastern Christianity if it remains so divided and in rivalry; its very existence is threatened. Furthermore, there are causes of justice, peace and freedom which all Middle Eastern Christian ought to rally around. To bring about this, Evangelicals must learn not only to respect their Orthodox sisters and brothers in their different traditions but also to work with them in witnessing to the gospel and speaking the truth to the world. Evangelicals must come to recognize that not all non-evangelicals are *nominal* Christians. For their part, the Orthodox must make a place for non-Eastern Christianity, i.e., for Evangelical Christianity, as an expression of worldwide Christianity, and not simply as a foreign transplant in their *territories*. The Orthodox have been positively challenged by Evangelicals in the past, and this could continue to be the case.

Bridges ought to be built between these two communities, and this consultation of the WCC is a most welcome attempt. The Middle East Council of Churches must also play a more intensive role in building these bridges since it includes Protestants who are open to and theologically accepting the Orthodox, and at the same time, can speak and understand the language of Evangelicalism.

Discussions between Orthodox and Evangelicals at the level of the CEC

Rev. Prof. Viorel Ionita

Mission and evangelism have been for a long time studied within the Conference of European Churches (CEC). As a result of this work it became clear that these two concepts did not have the same meaning for all. Mission for some comprised everything "which the church must do for the world." For others it was necessary "to distinguish between mission and evangelism without separating them."¹ Thus, plainly, Christians imagine different things from the terms *mission* and *evangelism*. This, however, is not to be understood absolutely as some kind of opposition but more as something complementary. At the consultation between CEC and the Council of European Bishops' Conferences (Santiago de Compostela, November 1991) the recommendation addressed to the churches was that they should "continue deepening the vital and decisive relationship between mission and evangelisation."²

Because of these perceptions the Xth Assembly of CEC in Prague (1-11 September 1992) prescribed for study the theme, *On the Way to a Common Mission: Witness and Responsibility of the European Churches*. Here among other things it was also recommended that in the context of this study-programme a consultation should take place between missionary societies and recognized churches "to clarify the dividing line between authentic evangelism and destructive proselytism."³

¹ Encounter at Stirling, Report of the Conference of European Churches' Assembly IX, Geneva, 1986, p. 160.

² Ibid. p. 174.

³ "God Unites - In Christ a New Creation": Report of the 10th Assembly of the Conference of European Churches, Geneva, 1993, p. 183.

Likewise, in Prague the recommendation was explicitly made that "in all its work the CEC should seek to cooperate with other groups and churches that are not in membership, particularly those in the Lausanne Conference."⁴

From this recommendation emerged a consultation on *Aspects of Mission and Evangelism in Europe Today. On the way to a Common Mission*. CEC's Study Secretariat organized this consultation, which took place on 12-13 June 1995 in the Baptist Family Retreat Centre in Dorfweil, Germany, and ran it together with the European Baptist Federation (EBF) and the European Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization (ELKWE). The aim of this consultation was "to discover what in the field of mission and evangelism is divisive, and above all what is common, to the discussion partners involved in it."

As a starter for the discussion the *question of canonical territory* was tackled. With reference to this was considered that the expression *canonical territory* came from the period when the church was undivided and it was thus meaningful only for the Catholic and Orthodox Churches. As regards the freedom which must nowadays be granted to everyone to belong to a specific religious communion or none at all, the question of canonical territory no longer had a role. In this case the question of canonical territory should be distinguished from the present ecumenical situation in Europe.

From a Baptist perspective if the expression *canonical territory* was understood territorially among the Orthodox, as appeared to be the case, and if the question of proselytism were linked to it, there would be difficulty in harmonizing the Orthodox position on canonical territory with the Baptist understanding of the freedom of all Christians to preach Jesus Christ wherever they wished. A Baptist could not accept the term *canonical territory*, above all if it was to be regarded as hindering each individual to believe what they wished, or indeed to change their faith.

From another point of view the term *canonical territory* was connected with the question of a local church's ecclesiology. One should perhaps understand the question as follows: that some group or other would not come from outside and form a new congregation within the territory of a local church either in ecclesiological or geographical terms without taking into account the local situation.

A second point discussed at the consultation in Dorfweil was *the question of tradition*. A Baptist participant wondered whether one understood tradition as the faith or confessional identity, along the lines that "a Bulgarian or a Russian must be Orthodox." An Orthodox participant from Russia replied that in Russia *Tradition* -- with a capital letter -- meant the passing on of the true faith; but if *tradition* was written with a small letter one could understand it as confessional

⁴ Ibid. p. 185.

identity, and in this latter sense *tradition* had a cultural background. Theologically speaking, the term *Tradition* -- with a capital letter, if you like -- was not to be confused with confessional identity: it embraces true faith in Jesus Christ and at the same time the uninterrupted experience of this faith from the time of the apostles right up to the present day.

Another point discussed in Dorfweil was *the question of the authority of the Bible, or how we handle the Bible, in our churches*. To Baptists the question of the Bible and of the authority of the Bible is of great concern; for them the Bible represents the sole authority in matters of faith. For the Orthodox understanding one must not handle the Bible - or Holy Scripture, as the Orthodox say - in such a way that it is taken out of the context of the early church: interpretation of Holy Scripture was to take place only *in, by and with* the church and not, for instance, against the church.

One of the chief concerns in the discussion at this consultation was *the question of the relation of evangelism to mission*. On the content and aims of evangelism from the Orthodox standpoint it was stressed that there were many definitions of this but that at any rate mission embraced more than evangelism; nevertheless it was less important to give definitions than to find ways for the gospel of the crucified and risen Lord to reach more and more people. The task of mission or of evangelism is clear; the problem arose over how one could fulfil this task.

According to the Baptist understanding evangelism means: reaching people with the gospel of Jesus Christ; asking them to use the gospel to search their hearts and to come for baptism on the basis of their own decision. Questions of ethics and morals should be regarded as axiomatically involved in this.

As a result, the discussion on mission and evangelism switched to the *question of baptism*. It was maintained that Baptists resolutely rejected the idea of rebaptism and this was the moot point, for if anyone came to the Baptists' form of baptism this was to be understood not as rebaptism but simply as *baptism*. With increasing frequency in the last few years, people have come to the Baptist faith and asked for baptism, explaining that when they had been baptized as little children this was not a baptism -- first and foremost because they had not received it as a result of believing.

At the Dorfweil Consultation *the question of relations between majority and minority churches*, or between the traditional established churches on the one hand and free churches on the other, cropped up repeatedly. If in a specific context there is tension between the majority and minority churches -- as unfortunately happens not infrequently in Europe -- the opportunities for a common mission in such a situation are very few.

In connection with the question of relations between majority and minority churches the question also arises how the churches concerned perceive and recognize each other. The discussion in Dorfweil made it clear that if the churches

want to arrive at "common mission," the presupposition for this is that they recognize each other as churches of Jesus Christ and behave towards each other accordingly -- which does not always happen. Here and there the Free churches, as minority churches, continue to be described by the majority churches as sects. If that is the case between Orthodox as majority churches and different Free churches, the latter ones are in turn not automatically recognizing the Orthodox as a true church of Jesus Christ.

At the consultation in Dorfweil between CEC, EBF and ELKWE many questions were raised but many of them were left open because of pressure of time. However, this made one aware that despite many differences in how mission and evangelism were understood, opportunities existed for dialogue between the partners at this consultation. All the participants wanted discussions of this kind to continue. In the statement which all the participants jointly and unanimously accepted something of the frankness and readiness for cooperation at this consultation was included. After the consultation this statement was published and looked on very favourably in many churches and church groups, as a result of which the Dorfweil Consultation in part achieved its objective.

Eastern Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism in Dialogue

Dr Bradley Nassif

Introduction

A re-evaluation of the role of communism in Eastern Europe has once more placed the Eastern Orthodox Church on the forefront of contemporary Christian thought. Missionaries from the West are meeting the Orthodox Church for the first time and often find themselves bewildered by its identity. Who are Orthodox Christians? What do they believe? Are they to be considered the friend or enemy of evangelical believers? These questions are not limited to western missionaries. Even well-established Protestant churches in Romania have struggled to obtain reliable answers on what the Orthodox Church believes and how to best relate to it. Quite often, authentic Christian dialogue has been hindered by fear and ignorance on both sides. On the one hand, theologically unsophisticated Orthodox fear that all evangelicals belong to one great heretical sea of undifferentiated darkness; on the other hand, misinformed evangelicals sometimes fear that the Orthodox Church is nothing more than a cult. As these encounters between the two traditions unfold, one can see that a painful legacy of mutual ignorance exists. Can anything be done to fulfill Jesus' prayer that all his followers "may be one, even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us" (Jn 17:21)?

The purpose of this article is to build bridges between the Orthodox and Evangelical churches through an emphasis on theological education. I wish to facilitate the birth of the study of Eastern Orthodox theology into the theological curriculum of evangelical education, and promote a vigorous agenda of research on this subject among theologians in this generation. In the few pages I have been privileged to write, I will try to achieve this by showing why the study of Eastern Orthodoxy is important in evangelical higher education, and will identify contemporary trends in Orthodox-Evangelical relations worldwide. These trends will reveal how major theologians from both traditions are beginning to explore

their common ground in a dialogue that is sure to be one of the most intriguing conversations to emerge at the dawn of the third millennium.¹

Why Study the Orthodox Church?

There are at least five reasons why evangelicals should study the Eastern Church.² First, Eastern Orthodoxy numbers nearly 185 million adherents worldwide. Of these, 70 million are in Russia alone and 17 million in Romania (the second largest population of Orthodox Christians anywhere). In these and other traditionally Orthodox countries the Orthodox Church has had a profound influence on shaping the culture. Believers who attempt to engage Romania with the gospel must know the Orthodox Church as well they would have to know Catholicism if living in Italy, Islam in Kuwait, or Mormonism in Utah (USA).

More important, a second reason for studying Orthodoxy is because Orthodoxy can be viewed as a common ally with evangelical churches because of their common defense of the basic truths of historic Christianity. The Orthodox Church maintains a firm commitment to the major doctrines of the faith. The great ecumenical councils and creeds which defended the Trinity, Incarnation, bodily resurrection, and second coming were largely achievements of the Byzantine Church. While there are important differences which certainly should not be minimized, such as sacramentalism and the veneration of Mary, there is unanimous agreement on most of the essentials of the faith.³

Third, Orthodoxy is strongest where evangelicalism is weakest. A growing number of Evangelicals have complained of experiencing reductionism, barrenness, or minimalism in their churches.⁴ There is a weak sense of tradition and lack of mystery in worship. In Orthodoxy, there is a strong sense of the majesty and mystery of God and a joyful celebration of the gospel in the liturgy.

¹ An introduction to the study of Eastern Orthodoxy written specially for evangelical students can be found in Bradley Nassif, "New Dimensions in Eastern Orthodox Theology," in *New Dimensions in Evangelical Thought. Essays in Honour of Millard Erickson*, ed. David Dockery, Inter Varsity Press, 1998. Though intended for a North American audience with little familiarity with European languages, it may serve as an introduction to the principal features of Orthodox theology and the methodological pitfalls to avoid when studying it.

² If given a similar opportunity by my Romanian Orthodox brethren, I could just as easily have written an essay on why we Orthodox should study evangelical history and theology.

³ See the dialogue between Dr. J.I. Packer and the author in *Reclaiming the Great Tradition: Evangelicals, Catholics, and Orthodox in Dialogue*, ed. James Cutsinger, Inter Varsity, 1977, pp. 155-184. Since so little has been done in comparing Orthodox and evangelical theology, the author has (reluctantly) cited his own works in this article — works which he sincerely hopes will be expanded and improved upon by future students.

⁴ Gary Burge, *Christianity Today* (October 6, 1997).

Fourth, Evangelicalism is strongest where Orthodoxy is weakest. This is the converse of the last point. If rightly appropriated, evangelical scholarship can offer an intellectual credibility for the faith that is needed by modern Orthodoxy, especially in the area of biblical criticism and the clear proclamation of the gospel. The Orthodox are just beginning to come to terms with biblical criticism and have too often uncritically accepted the conclusions of liberal Protestant or Catholic critics. We would do better to learn from evangelical experts because of their conservative meticulous scholarship.⁵

Fifth, a critical understanding of the Orthodox Church will enable evangelicals to know how to evangelize nominal Orthodox Christians without being divisive. They can also be in a better position to strengthen renewal movements within the Orthodox Church itself (such as the Lord's Army in Romania).⁶

Contemporary Trends

Clearly, Evangelicals need to better understand the Eastern Church and visa versa. Among evangelicals there is a rising interest among important theologians and seminaries. Theologians include J.I. Packer, Paul Negrut, Thomas Oden, Miroslav Volf, Donald Bloesch, Kenneth Kantzer and others. In evangelical seminaries over the past five years a small number of courses on the Orthodox Church have begun to be offered. These include Fuller, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, and Gordon Conwell (to name only a few of the better known). Moreover, a very stimulating course was team-taught as recent as last July by Dr. J.I. Packer and the present author at Regent College in Canada. It was titled *Eastern Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism in Dialogue*. The very existence of such a course offered by a scholar of Dr. Packer's stature demonstrates that Orthodox-Evangelical dialogue is not only a possibility, but is actually one of the most

⁵ I have noted this repeatedly in other places (*New Perspectives on Historical Theology: Essays in Memory of John Meyendorff*, ed. Bradley Nassif, Eerdmans, 1976, p. xiv. The finest comparison of hermeneutical principles has been by Grant Osborne, "The Many and the One: The Interface between Eastern Orthodox and Protestant Hermeneutics," in *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*, vol. 3:1995. Osborne is Professor of NT at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. The Publication of the article by St. Vladimir's Orthodox Seminary in New York is a significant sign of Orthodox interest in the subject. See also scholarly works on biblical criticism by such evangelicals as, among others, F.F. Bruce, Ralph Martin, Grant Osborne, Murray Harris, I. Howard Marshall, Donald Guthrie, Donald Hagner, Walter Liefeld, Moises Silva, and Bruce Waltke.

⁶ For a suggestion on how evangelicals should do missionary work among the Orthodox see Bradley Nassif, "Evangelical Missions in Eastern Orthodox Lands," in *Trinity World Forum* (Winter, 1996), (published by Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, IL).

important ecumenical conversations in which evangelicals can engage.⁷ To be sure, work in this area is just beginning at all of these schools and the momentum must be patiently nurtured by qualified faculty; but the future is as bright as it has ever been in the history of evangelical theological education. Seminaries that develop curricular emphases in Eastern Christianity will be better prepared to offer a comprehensive perspective on global theology. A balanced theological education demands its inclusion.

Looking in the other direction, Orthodox seminaries that offer courses on evangelicalism are farther behind than evangelical seminaries, but even there one sees a growing desire to better understand evangelical identity. Holy Cross Greek Orthodox Seminary in Brookline, Massachusetts, makes evangelical courses available to its students through its sister consortium school, Gordon Conwell Seminary. It is now considering hosting the annual meeting of the Society for the Study of Eastern Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism (see below) in 1998. St. Nersess, an Armenian Orthodox seminary and sister school of St. Vladimir's in New York, invited an Armenian evangelical (Joseph Alexanian) to teach a course on evangelism in the book of Acts in the summer, 1994. From 1995 to the present Metropolitan Philip Saliba of the Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese took a bold step forward in this regard by asking the author to offer a new course to our Antiochian seminarians on *Orthodoxy and American Evangelicalism*. The course is now offered every summer at the Antiochian House of Studies in Ligonier, Pennsylvania. If done wisely, more faculty exchange programs would break down caricatures and stereotypes. Romania would seem to be a strategic place for this kind of exchange to begin. Perhaps the Orthodox academy in Bucharest would be willing to take the lead among the Orthodox in Europe with the help of my friend, Fr. Ion Bria, who was recently involved in a World Council of Churches meeting between Orthodox and evangelicals in Alexandria (see below). Paul Negrut could possibly lead the evangelical side of the dialogue, especially since he did his doctorate on Orthodox soteriology (though I have not read this myself).

Finally, I wish to highlight several organizations and mission agencies which have emerged over the past decade that are dedicated to making the Orthodox and evangelical traditions known and understood in relation to each other. In July, 1995, the World Council of Churches sponsored their first international conference, convened in Alexandria, Egypt between representatives of Orthodox churches and people of evangelical commitment. This was a follow-up meeting from the WCC's Canberra Assembly in 1991 where it became apparent

⁷ The title for this article was adapted from the class which is available on audiocassette from Regent College Bookstore (5800 University Boulevard, Vancouver B.C., Canada V6T 2E4, or 1-800-663-8664). Dr. Packer requested that most of the course content center on an introduction to the Orthodox Church and he, in turn, comments only where he felt it was relevant or in response to student questions. See also my presentation on "Eastern Orthodox and Evangelical Spirituality: The Core of a Common Agenda," a lecture for Regent.

that evangelicals and Orthodox shared common doctrinal concerns over issues that denied historic Christian faith.

Another venture is *Evangelicals for Middle East Understanding* (EMEU) based in Chicago. Much of their work is dedicated to raising the level of consciousness among North American evangelicals, informing them of the precarious existence of Eastern Christians living in the Middle East. Through conferences and study tours, EMEU has sought to bring together Middle Eastern and Western Christian leaders.

Finally, the most theologically focused group of Orthodox and evangelicals today appears to be the *Society for the Study of Eastern Orthodoxy and Evangelicalism* (SSEOE). This is a learned society which meets annually at the Billy Graham Center at Wheaton College and hopefully soon at Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology in Massachusetts. According to its Constitution, the SSEOE seeks to serve both the academy and the church by identifying the similarities and differences between the Orthodox and evangelical traditions in the areas of history, doctrine, worship, and spirituality. The Society has been given endorsements from world renowned leaders from both Orthodoxy and evangelicalism. A sampling of their comments will show just how important they believe the dialogue to be.⁸

The roster of Orthodox names include Bishop Kallistos Ware (Oxford University) who states, "The SSEOE is fulfilling a vital role... How much we have to gain from listening to each other!"

Fr. Stanley Harakas (Professor Emeritus, Holy Cross Greek Orthodox Seminary), comments, "In the post-Soviet world, with the opening of traditionally Orthodox nations to the potential for open proselytism, Evangelical and Orthodox relations can go in one of two directions: either return to the dangers of a pre-ecumenical era, or change the course of history. The SSEOE has already begun addressing this important theological and practical missiological question. Much good can come of such a scholarly dialogue."

Metropolitan Philip Saliba (Antiochian Archdiocese of North America), declares, "We are happy to endorse the good work you and your organization are doing to promote fellowship and mutual enrichment among those engaged in your activities. We hope that you will be fruitful and multiply in membership so that the message of Jesus Christ according to the biblical and apostolic teachings, will be known to all."

The late Fr. John Meyendorff (Dean, St. Vladimir's Seminary, NY), tried to help the author establish a Russian chapter of the SSEOE by introducing him to

⁸ The following quotations are taken from the official letters given by these men for publication in the SSEOE brochure.

the Patriarch's office, but unfortunately Fr. John died before seeing the fruit of his labors.

On the evangelical side, leading theologians include Drs. Kenneth Kantzer (Dean Emeritus, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School; Senior Editor, *Christianity Today* magazine) who says, "Nothing but good could come from serious conversations between Eastern Orthodox thinkers and conservative Evangelicals. This Society provides just such a forum."

Kent Hill (President of Eastern Nazarene College, and author of *The Soviet Puzzle*) observes, "At a time when tensions are growing between the Russian Orthodox Church and other Christian confessions within the former Soviet Union, the importance of the work of the SSEOE is more significant than ever. I heartily commend the effort to increase understanding and genuine Christian relations which this Society is dedicated to providing."

Ward Gasque (New Testament authority on the history of interpretation of Acts) states, "For far too long Evangelical and Orthodox theologians have gone about their work with very little dialogue with one another... The SSEOE is, I believe, the beginning of good things to come!"

Bill Bright (President and Founder of Campus Crusade for Christ) says, "I am glad to join the SSEOE. I believe this will lead to fruitful dialogue and cooperative relations between Christians and thus will better serve the cause of Christ." Other theologians who have participated in our annual meetings include Donald Bloesch, Thomas Oden, and Harold O.J. Brown.

The sum of these and other attempts to build bridges demonstrates how Eastern Orthodoxy is emerging as a vital issue in modern theology and missiology. Without minimizing our known and continuing differences in sacramental theology and ecclesiology, it is time for us to see that our two traditions are largely consistent with the creeds, councils, and fathers of the first millennium of Christian history. Our common cup is just as much half full as it is half empty. All of this of course, assumes as I do that Orthodoxy and evangelicalism are compatible at the heart of the gospel. However, this can only be demonstrated through serious and sustained research in the area of comparative theology which is beyond the scope of this essay. As we look to the future, let us harness the energy we have previously used against each other and combine it to work toward a common agenda. An unprecedented opportunity for growth, reconstruction, and renewal lies before us as we stand poised for one of the most fruitful theological encounters of the 21st century.

The WCC Mission Statement: A Paper for Discussion

Dr Elaine Storkey

Christianity is a missionary religion. The WCC draft statement on mission, drawn up in 1997, begins with an acceptance that mission is central to the Christian faith. As Christians we believe that the good news of Jesus Christ is as relevant and important today as it was in the first century, and that the proclamation of Christ remains the key task of the Church in whichever culture, ethnic group, language or tradition people find themselves. So evangelism, which is part of mission, remains the calling of the church in our age. One concern of this document is to identify right and wrong ways of carrying out the task of evangelization. The focus is on diversity in unity, rather than diversity and mutual suspicion.

The Context of Mission

The context of mission has, however, changed, for our cultures have changed. These changes offer fundamental challenges not only to the way we talk about mission, but to the way we attempt to do it - that is to present the gospel of Christ. Key areas were identified, namely the areas of *globalization, post-modernity, fragmentation and religious pluralism*. These have crept up on us in a way we could not have envisaged fifty years ago. Some of these changes were in their infancy when the statement of 1982 was formulated. We were marvelling then at the speed with which communication networks could be set up, and the ease with which human beings could travel across the world. Globalization has become bigger and more enveloping than we had even then experienced. Within seconds we can access information, opinion, truths and untruths from almost anywhere in the globe. We can meet any international emergency with money, expertise,

medical help and scientific resources from anywhere in the globe, in a matter of hours. We can communicate the gospel to people way beyond the confines of our church buildings and our priests and preachers. Through the moving images, on satellite television and on the Internet, audiences of millions can be taught the Word of God.

But we would underestimate the challenge of globalization if we thought of it as benign. There are many dangers. For example, even in global communication there is a question of truth. There is little way of monitoring what is passed across the world on the Internet. The sheer volume, speed and pervasiveness makes this impossible. So how are we to ensure that what is passed on through the global media is indeed true? This is a concern whatever is being communicated, but it matters even more emphatically when it is about the fundamentals of our faith in Christ. Another danger is the way in which the global economy is able to create poverty on a scale hitherto unexperienced. The growing power of transnational corporations, the dependence upon them by many countries of the South and the way the economic livelihood of those countries can be held at ransom is alarming. There is no limit to the effect these corporations can have on the global economy. A third problem is that globalization accentuates injustice, for example, in trading patterns, where prices are not fixed by the two-third world countries producing the goods (coffee, cocoa, minerals) but by rich nations who buy them; or in the way in which a country can simultaneously be one of the world's biggest food exporters and hungriest countries (Brazil for instance). Finally, the specter of international debt overshadows everything and its effect is that some of the poorest countries of the world are simply bankrupt with no way of things becoming any better whilst the debt remains. All these challenges provide the context for our proclamation of the good news of Christ. But it is not surprising when some of the world's poor feel that the same people are proclaiming the good news and bringing the bad news. Who can blame the poor if they become confused about the message?

If globalization had taken place in the context of a world view which had been Christian who knows what blessings it might have bestowed upon the globe? But it has taken place in a very different context: largely in a post-modern one. It has been accompanied by other features of post-modernity: the shift from word to image, the fragmentation of meaning, the relativization of truth, the rejection of tradition, the immersing in the present and the focus on experience. Consequently, it has produced more problems than solutions for the proclamation of the gospel. Post-modernity denies the truth of any "meta-narrative." Yet what has emerged in this combination of post-modernity and globalization is a new meta-narrative: economism. This is nothing less than the growth of a consumerist world view, where in the absence of any other acceptable "grand-narratives" all values ultimately become economic and consumer ones.

In this new cultural context we now have the means whereby every area of life can be commodified. Sex becomes a mass consumer item through pornography; books become instant sellers and then are pulped; works of art are judged by their price; human embryos can be purchased in a variety of ways and disposed of when unwanted; weapons of mass destruction can be traded and marketed as avidly as iced drinks; times of personal or national grief can become media events to be consumed and paid for by the public; children can be bought for pleasure by Western consumers in East Asia; worship is a sing-a-long and trials of justice become media money spinners generating new big earners. Even Christian conversion before the living God is paraded along with appeals for money on a banal hyped television show. Globalization and post-modern consumerism have enabled us to reduce life, death, justice, marriage, worship and God to the religion of consumption backed by the hymns of advertizing.

New Missionary Movements

In this context it is not difficult to understand the various new missionary movements which have sprung up. The document of 1997 identifies the growth of what it describes as predatory groups coming into cultures where the church is already evident, but not working with them in a spirit of unity. In my view the document spends far too long on these groups. It is in danger of giving the impression that one of the most crucial issues in our contemporary context is the proliferation of missionary activity, usually evangelical activity which is deemed to be at the expense of the Orthodox churches. But the issues of post-modernity and globalization are far bigger and more central than the internal squabble within Christianity about who does the evangelizing. I also think that motives are often badly misunderstood. However culturally unaware such missionary groups might be, there is no doubt that their motive is to proclaim Christ. They are not our enemies, but our brethren and sisters. We are members of the same family, as St Paul points out, members of the same body. Where they do not see that, it is our responsibility, as "stronger brethren" to help them to see it. Where members of the family are immature, we help them to grow up by love, patience, discipline and good example, not by becoming belligerent or childish in our responses to them.

It is possible to argue, of course, that the growth of such groups is one aspect of the post-modern fragmentation and individualism of western culture. Even though they believe themselves to be following the call of Christ, they do not see this call as being one which is inclusive of other Christians whom they misunderstand or with whom they disagree. If there is this autonomy of belief there are bound to be weaknesses in the outreach itself, and these will become evident, and others may have to pick up the pieces. Yet even so, the ultimate solution is not to attack the symptoms but to focus on the underlying causes in Western culture as a whole. It is the global, post-modern context which poses the depth of the

challenges we face, and the attack on our humanity from global values of consumerism which constitutes the real enemy; not groups of Christian missionaries.

The Call to Mission

There are very many aspects to our call to mission. But I want to mention just four which are implied by the statement although not necessarily fully developed.

(1) *Call to Prophetic Critique.* A very real part of our Christian calling is to offer a sound critique of our contemporary world which can be heard in the market place. There are many people of peace and good will in our world who are not taken in by the slogans of consumerism and who wish to resist the way in which our cultures are being pushed. It is my experience that when we offer a Christian critique of what they know to be wrong, we find such people are ready to listen. In fact they are more able to understand the Christian message because it is given in a context with which they are all too familiar, and would like to be different. I believe this to be a key part of our evangelism today.

(2) *A Call to Integrity and Personhood.* The post-modern fragmentation and cynicism about the self is well documented. It is the subject of novels, films, science fiction, popular lyrics. Leading ethicists redefine personhood to include only those capable of "high levels of self-consciousness" and suggest that we have a duty, even an obligation to abortion, euthanasia, or infanticide towards those incapable of this consciousness. Once again there are many people in our societies who feel profoundly disturbed by these analyses but do not know what they can put in their place. The Christian faith offers such a profound understanding of the human person: of ourselves as relational and communitarian beings, created uniquely in the image of God for love. When we are able to speak and live out these truths in our relationships, our churches and our communities, we are able to demonstrate what we believe and draw others to Christ.

(3) *A Call to Unity.* There is no doubt that the sight of Christians who can work together in love is an encouragement to faith and a challenge to unbelief. That is why dialogue among Christians is vital, and why every effort must be made to get to know and understand those with whom we think we have little in common. The onus is on those from newer traditions to recognize that others have trod this road with Christ long before they were born. It is also on those from older traditions to recognize that length of history does not confer greater status than freshness of belief. But whenever we can act and move and think in love towards one another, even with a struggle, we honor Christ and defeat evil.

(4) *A Call to Preaching.* The proclamation of the Word is always a proclamation in context. We preach in an embodied way: we embody Christ in our love and our relationships. Yet it is possible to be so taken up with embodiment

that we forget we are also called to preach. The early church used all opportunities and many different methods for spreading the faith amongst unbelievers. The call to repentance and to faith was made publicly; Christ was proclaimed amongst the Gentiles, the pagans, the unbelievers and those of other faiths as well as among the Jews. It is no different for us today. Christians have never had the luxury of concentrating only on those people with whom we feel most comfortable. We are called to proclaim also to those who are different. To be faithful evangelists we must not assume that because people have access to a church that is sufficient. We need to be more proactive, to develop specific ministries of evangelism, where these do not exist, and find whatever ways we can of entering the world and lives of people everywhere with the truth of Christ's redeeming love.