

# **Edinburgh to Salvador: Twentieth Century** **Ecumenical Missiology by T.V. Philip**

T. V. Philip, born in India and a lay member of the Mar Thoma Church, has worked and taught in India, Europe, USA and Australia. He is a church historian, and a former Professor at the United Theological College, Bangalore, India. This book was published jointly by CSS and ISPCK, 1999, Kashmere Gate, Delhi, India. This material was prepared for Religion Online by Ted and Winnie Brock.

**(ENTIRE BOOK)** An historical study of the ecumenical discussions on mission as expressed in the conferences and assemblies of the International Missionary Council and the World Council of Churches.

## **Preface**

This book is a study of the great missionary conferences covering the period of the first world missionary conference at Edinburgh 1910 to the last ecumenical conference at Salvador 1996. This is an important period in which significant developments in mission theology took place.

## **Chapter 1: The Missionary Background of the Modern Ecumenical Movement**

Pietism in Germany, the evangelical efforts of the Wesleys and Whitefield, and Jonathan Edwards as one of the leaders of the great awakening – these cultivated the fertile soil for the modern Protestant missionary movement.

## **Chapter 2: Church and Mission**

In the beginning, there was a separation between church and mission giving a disastrous consequence to both. In the beginning, the mission was considered to be from East to West; there were problems relating to the trinity; there were problems relating to the younger churches. The growth of mission was dependent upon the solution of these and other problems.

## **Chapter 3: Mission and Unity**

It was not the aim of the early protestant missionary movement, but it was ecumenical, hence the mission of the church and the unity of the church were recognized as belonging together but not until after some tension between the two.

## **Chapter 4: World, Mission, and Church**

Mission discovered the church between 1919 and 1960, but the next twenty years saw the church discovering the world as the locus of its life and mission. The missionary movement was very slow in recognizing the importance of the secular world in its thinking, but thanks to great theologians such as Bonhoeffer and others it became clear that the church's nature and function needed to be rethought in relation to God's concern for the whole world.

## **Chapter 5: Ecumenical -- Evangelical Polarity**

There is tension between the terms "Ecumenical" and "Evangelical." These terms have become symbols of opposed positions and divisions: the former term refers to those who would transform society, the latter, those who would emphasize evangelism and personal conversion.

## **Chapter 6: The Kingdom of God and Mission**

The church-centric view of mission versus the Kingdom of God: A review of the tension not only between mission and church, but between mission; church and society.

## **Chapter 7: Mission and The World of Religions and Cultures**

A discussion concerning the necessity of finding a way of reconciling Christian theism with the truth of Aristotle and the world of Muslim scholars concerning scholasticism, and the continuing problem that develops where the dynamic interactions between the Gospel and cultures inevitable raise the question of syncretism.

## **Appendix: Mission and Evangelism -- An Ecumenical Affirmation**

The statement on mission made by the World Council of Churches in 1982. This included lengthy discussion with churches from all over the world.

## **Selected Bibliography**

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## **Preface**

This book is an attempt to give an overview of the twentieth century developments in ecumenical missiology. It covers the period from the first world missionary conference at Edinburgh 1910 to the last ecumenical conference at Salvador 1996.

If great missionary expansion took place in the nineteenth century, the twentieth century saw important developments in mission theology. It was the missionary movement and the churches in the mission field that gave impetus for the emergence of the modern ecumenical movement at the beginning of this century. In turn, the ecumenical movement discovered mission as its *raison d'être*. Hence the ecumenical interest in mission theology. There were also great missiological developments in denominational churches as well as in less formalized groups such as women's groups, social action groups and youth and student movements. Today there is a vast body of material available on the subject. To bring them all together into one volume like the present one is an impossible task. This study is limited to missiological thinking as expressed in the conferences and assemblies of the International Missionary Council and the World Council of Churches. The author is fully aware that official meetings and statements do not always reflect the thinking at local situations.

The ecumenical missionary conferences during this period were:



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## **Chapter 1: The Missionary Background of the Modern Ecumenical Movement**

### **Evangelical Awakening and the Missionary Movement**

The immediate background of the modern Protestant missionary movement was the evangelical awakening in the protestant churches in the West in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The evangelical awakening had its roots in the earlier German Pietism. Pietism was a movement in the Lutheran church in Germany which arose towards the end of the 17th century and continued in the first half of the 18th century as a reaction to the sterility of the then prevailing Lutheran Orthodoxy. Philip Jacob Spener (1635-1705) and Herman Franke (1663-1727) were progenitors of the movement and for them, Christianity was far more a life than an intellectual assent to a doctrine. An insistence upon the personal, individualistic and subjective element in religion was characteristic of their teaching. Because they believed that the much needed reforms of the Lutheran church could not come from those in authority, they recommended that in every congregation those who were earnest about the soul's salvation should form cells within the church (ecclesiola in ecclesia) for Bible study, for fellowship and Christian experience.



## Pietism made the protestant missionary enterprise.<sup>4</sup>

The origins of the evangelical revival differed in different countries. In Germany, as mentioned earlier, the evangelical revival can be traced to Pietism. In Britain, its impulse came largely through the evangelical efforts of the Wesleys and Whitefield, the rise of Methodism and the creation of the evangelical party in the Church of England. The first outstanding leader of the awakening in the USA was Jonathan Edwards. The awakening continued throughout the nineteenth century. The form of Christianity practiced and preached by the founding fathers of the evangelical revival was intensely personal and experiential; they described it as 'vital religion'. The important characteristics of the religious revival as a whole were a concern for vital religion and a large number of philanthropic and charitable activities. They fought against vices, moral and social, in their efforts to convert the nation. There was also an intense concern for mission to the heathens.

According to Ian Bradley<sup>5</sup>, most important of the humanitarian ventures of nineteenth century England had evangelical inspiration and leadership. Their evangelizing interest took them naturally into those places where humanity was least regenerate - into prisons, brothels, the factories and slums. The cruelty and misery they saw there angered and appalled them and made them devote themselves to fighting for reforms and improvements. The basis of their response to poverty and suffering was emotional rather than ideological. The sight of a half-starved child brought tears of compassion and led them to dig deep in their pockets, not to ponder over the economic and social order, which had brought it about. Elizabeth Fry's work in prisons, Josephine Butler's crusade on behalf of the prostitutes, Barnardo's mission to deprived children, Edward Rudolf's establishment of the Society for Waifs and Strays, Shaftesbury's movement for the reform of factory system, and the efforts to uplift the condition of the working class, all had evangelical inspiration and leadership. It is said that the evangelical movement made philanthropy a major industry in Victorian England.

The Evangelicals were drawn to philanthropic activities by a variety of motives. In part they were simply obeying Christ's command to feed the hungry and clothe the naked. In part, they also undertook it as preliminary to attempts at conversion. Above all they were devoted to good works because they were profoundly moved by human want and suffering. However, all of them agreed that sin was at the root of human misery and that religion alone offered a lasting remedy to it.<sup>6</sup>













social classes seemed trivial compared to those between the regenerate and damned. As Joseph Miller, the great Evangelical Anglican remarked, "Insignificant indeed are all the distinctions of another kind compared with these, converted or unconverted... heirs of heaven or heirs of hell".<sup>23</sup> The ecumenical spirit of the Evangelicals is seen clearly in the following statement of an Anglican priest:

I confess, though a clergy man of the Establishment, I see no evil in joining in public worship or social intercourse, with any of the denominations of Christians. I hear what passes with candor, join where I approve, and reject whatever appears contrary to Scripture, and the plain dictates of sound reason and common sense. I am well aware this comes not up to the full standard of orthodoxy. But if such conduct constitutes a bad churchman, I feel not anxious to be accounted a good one?<sup>24</sup>

Evangelicals realized that they shared an experience that marked them off decisively from all others and gathered them together in the fellowship of an invisible church of Christ to which all 'vital' Christians belonged. The evangelical experience was not a matter of theological reflection, but rather a general experiential crisis rooted in a deep seated sense of sinfulness and spiritual insufficiency and a thirst for assurance of personal salvation. Non-conformists and churchmen alike rejoiced to find that others had fought through the same spiritual and temporal conflicts as themselves. For them, "If the theologies could divide, experience could unite".<sup>25</sup>

Even in doctrine, the Evangelicals sensed that they were chosen together. They held in common not only the Bible but also the leading doctrine they believed it contained, including original sin, justification by faith, and illumination and sanctification by the Holy Spirit. The central doctrine that transcended in importance all the others, was justification by faith. Here the Anglican Evangelicals felt more in common with the Methodists or the Dissenters than with the High Church Anglicans. They had experienced the same salvation as the others. Though Episcopalians, they did not hold with the high church Anglicans that episcopacy was the esse of the church. It was ancient, apostolical and beneficial, but not of dominical authority. Many of the Evangelical Anglicans experienced a conflict of mind and heart. They knew in their hearts and minds that they were respectable and loyal members of the national church; but they also knew in their hearts that

they were Evangelicals sharing with other Evangelicals a common faith and experience that transcended denominational boundaries and theological parties.

The most important area in which the Evangelicals co-operated was in the area of mission. For the Evangelicals, the principal task was to preach the Gospel to the heathen; and one of the greatest evils of the time was denominational bigotry that needed to be destroyed. Roger Martin mentions that in 1794, Melville Home, in his letter on Missions addressed to the Protestant ministers of British churches, observed that a missionary should be far removed from narrow bigotry and possess a spirit that was truly catholic. He said:

It is not Calvinism, it is not Arminianism, but Christianity that he is to teach. It is not the hierarchy of the Church of England, it is not the principle of Protestant Dissenters that he has in view to propagate. His object is to serve the Church Universal.<sup>26</sup>

Unfortunately, this dream of the Evangelicals did not materialize in the mission field and hence, a major concern of the ecumenical movement today remains the issues of faith and order.

The protestant missionary enterprise was characterized in the beginning by co-operation across national and denominational lines. In certain cases people from different denominations co-operated in founding missionary societies. The London Missionary Society (LMS) was a common effort of British Evangelicals from four or more denominations. At the general meeting of the Society in 1795, David Bogue declared:

We have now before us a pleasing spectacle. Christians of different denominations, although differing in points of Church government, united in forming a society for propagating the Gospel among the heathen. This is a new thing in the Christian Church ... Here are Episcopalians, Methodists, Presbyterians, and Independents all united in one society, all going to form its law, to regulate its institutions, and manage its various concerns. Behold us here assembled with one accord to attend the funeral of bigotry. And may she be buried so deep that a particle of her dust may ever be thrown up on the face of the earth. <sup>27</sup>

In the 'fundamental principles' of the society, adopted in 1796, it was stated:

That its design is not to send Presbyterianism, Independency, Episcopacy, or any other forms of Church order and government (about which there may be difference of opinion among senior persons), but the glorious Gospel of the blessed God, to the heathen; and that it shall be left (as it ought to be left) to the minds of the persons whom God may call into the fellowship of his Son for them, to assume for themselves such forms of Church government as to them shall appear most acceptable to the word of God. <sup>28</sup>

There was also co-operation between different societies in the early period of the missionary movement. R. Pierce Beaver in his book, *The Ecumenical Beginnings*, gives a detailed account of the early efforts in co-operation.<sup>29</sup> The Church Missionary Society (CMS) and the London Missionary Society (LMS) employed Germans, Swiss and Swedes, both Lutheran and Reformed. Janikes' Seminary in Germany supplied missionaries for British and Dutch societies. The Basel Missionary Society (1815) not only sent its people directly, but also supplied missionaries for the CMS and LMS and pastors for Reformed, Lutheran and Evangelical Churches in the USA. The Swedish Missionary Society despite its solidly Lutheran constituency, appointed Moravian and English Wesleyans to its governing board and for more than a decade made grants to the Basel, London, Wesleyan and Moravian societies.<sup>30</sup> The SPCK (the Anglican society) supported German Lutheran clergy in several missions in India.<sup>31</sup> Each missionary society published news about the activities of others in its magazine.

Thus according to Beaver, the early Protestant missionary enterprise was drawn together, influenced and supported one another, and felt a sense of unity and fellowship not known to many in the Church in a time of denominational loyalty and exclusiveness. The very battle against indifference, inertia, and official opposition, which they had to wage for the recognition of missionary privilege and obligation, sharpened their sense of unity and common purpose.<sup>32</sup>

But as years passed, as mission boards grew in strength, and as

denominationalism asserted itself, this noteworthy development almost wholly disappeared. The LMS, which was started as a non-denominational society, eventually became principally a Congregationalist Board. Similarly, in America the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, at first a non-denominational agency, later became an organ of the Congregational Church.<sup>33</sup> Questions were raised in the mission field regarding the creed, ministry and order that should be given to a congregation in Africa or Asia. The answer was the creed or the ministry of the missionary's 'home church'. Thus denominational churches arose in the mission field. In several instances, this slowed down the early co-operation in mission. The period between 1820 and 1830 was to be a turning point for Anglo-Lutheran collaboration in India. In those years an almost full anglicanization was carried out throughout the South Indian missions of the SPCK and CMS. Bishop Middleton of Calcutta insisted that Anglican societies should send out to India only men with Anglican ordination. In 1825, Bishop Heber in India re-ordained three German Lutheran missionaries.<sup>34</sup> From the history of the missionary movement of this period we must note that mission certainly raises the question of unity, but unity cannot avoid serious consideration of ecclesiological issues. That is, unity, if it is to last, cannot be kept at the pragmatic and practical level of co-operation and comity in missions.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, Protestant missionary organizations in most countries were pursuing their own courses independently of other societies. Earlier examples of co-operation largely disappeared as each missionary society advanced its own program and sent its own denominational missionaries. The missionaries in the field were the first to feel the tragedy of division among the churches.

Even as early as 1906, Gustav Warneck, the German mission historian had suggested that instead of establishing new missionary societies, an endeavor should be made towards the union of missionary societies. "We have diffusion more than enough," he wrote, "If it is still carried further upon principle, it must ultimately lead to the breaking up of the evangelical missions to atoms ... separation is weakness, conciliation is strength."<sup>35</sup>

The Serampore missionaries in India were strict Baptists. When the Baptist society was formed in England, it was a denominational society; William Carey himself felt that it should be so considering the

denominational situation of the time. They had kept the non-Baptist away from the Lord's table. However, in India, under the insistence of William Ward who was one of the three original missionaries, they resolved to be 'Catholic'. "We could not doubt," wrote Ward, "that Watts, Edwards, Brainard, Dodridge, and Whitefield, although not Baptists, had been welcomed to His table by our Lord. On what grounds should we exclude such? Rather than engage in a furious controversy about baptism, to the gratification of Satan, while people perish, we rejoice to shake off this apparent moroseness that has made us unlovely to our fellow Christians."<sup>36</sup>

Thus, the resolution of the Serampore missionaries was to be 'Catholic'. The word 'Catholic' is very often a misunderstood and misused term. Unfortunately it has been claimed and used by racial, denominational and sectarian churches. The word really speaks of openness, wholeness and ecumenism rather than a quality of separation. It has nothing to do with the structure of ministry in the church, or the practice of baptism. The Serampore missionaries also raised a very fundamental question. What right have we to prevent people from the Lord's table, when the Lord welcomes them. It must be stressed that in the history of the Church, it has been the people engaged in mission in the world who have often raised fundamental questions about the nature of the church, its catholicity and unity. This was so in the case of the early church. It is in this sense that mission was the originator of the modern ecumenical movement.

### **Conferences in the Mission Fields**

In 1806, William Carey proposed to the Baptist Missionary Society in England that a World Missionary Conference be held in the Cape of Good Hope in 1810, to be repeated every ten years. He pointed out that, "We should understand better in two hours than by two years of letters". To this proposal, Fuller, the Secretary of the society replied:

I admire Carey's proposal, though I can not say that I approve. It shows an enlarged mind, and, I have heard them say that great men dream differently from others. This is one of Carey's pleasing dreams. But, seriously, I see no important object to be attained by such a meeting, which might not quite well be realized without. And in the gatherings of all denominations there would be no unity, without which we had better stay at home.<sup>37</sup>

If William Carey's dream was not realized immediately on a world scale, it found partial and significant fulfillment on a national, regional and /or local basis. From 1825 onwards gatherings of missionaries of various nationalities and denominational allegiances were held in India, Japan, China and Latin America. They were concerned with the needs and problems of the missionary enterprise in their particular areas. They did much to foster, as well as express, a unity which over arched denominational differences.<sup>38</sup> Japan's first Missionary Conference was held in 1872 in Yokohama. Recognizing that denominational divisions 'obscure the oneness of the church', the Conference unanimously resolved to work for the advent in Japan of a United Church of Christ. There were several missionary conferences in Shanghai, China, from 1877. At the third conference held in Shanghai in 1907, Christian Unity was an important consideration. The missionaries urged that the most immediate pressing step was the unification of the Chinese churches holding the same ecclesiastical order.

The most prominent motif running through all these regional and national conferences was co-operation in mission. There was a pragmatic approach to Christian co-operation for the sake of evangelistic efficiency. The central purpose of such meetings was the exposition and discussions of the facts and problems of missionary work. The meetings also provided opportunity for special fellowship and social intercourse. It helped dissipate suspicion, prevent misunderstandings and create an atmosphere of friendliness and co-operation. There was no questioning of denominational ecclesiology as such, instead they felt that there was sufficient spiritual unity among them to co-operate in missions. However in grappling with missions and co-operation, it began to dawn on many of them that disunity was a source of weakness for the spread of the Gospel and some expressed the need for church unity. The result of such conferences was the establishment of several union institutions such as colleges and hospitals. Another result was the acceptance of 'comity' in missionary work. Comity meant basically the division of territory and assignment of spheres of occupation including delineation of boundaries on the one hand, and non-interference in another mission's affairs on the other. Non-interference involved more than avoidance of competition; it also involved mutual recognition and common agreement in the employment of workers, their salaries, standards of membership in the churches, transfer of membership, the adoption of similar standards of discipline and respect for each other's discipline.

The missionary conferences in the mission field not only acknowledged that disunity was a source of weakness for the spread of the Gospel, but also asked whether or not it was the aim of all missionary work to plant, in each non-Christian nation, one undivided Church of Christ. The World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh stated that throughout the mission field there was an earnest and growing desire for closer fellowship, and for the unity of the broken Church of Christ. It said:

While we may differ from one another in our conception of what unity involves and requires, we agree in believing that our Lord intended that we should be one in a visible fellowship, and we desire to express our whole hearted agreement with those who took part in the great conference of Shanghai, in holding that the ideal object of missionary work is to plant in every non-Christian nation one united Church of Christ. ... The Church in Western lands will reap a glorious reward from its missionary labours, if the church in the mission field points the way to a healing of its divisions and to the attainment of that unity for which our Lord prayed.<sup>39</sup>

Behind all practical schemes of union in the mission field, there were two divergent approaches to union. One approach emphasized the things which are common to all Christians. Those who believed in God the Father of Jesus Christ, who worshiped and obeyed Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, who believed in the Holy Spirit, in the forgiveness of sins, and the life everlasting, and who accepted the Christian Scriptures as their authority and guide, appeared to be already united by their own faith and experience in a fellowship so intimate and real that the matters on which they differed must sink to a subordinate place. In the face of non-Christian systems of life and thought, the things which separated Christians from one another were nothing when compared with those which separated Christians from those who had not apprehended God in Christ. Those who held this view were inclined towards forming a federation of Christian churches. The other approach placed greater emphasis on those things which divided Christians. According to them some of the things which divided Christians were essential aspects of divine revelation or essential means of Grace. To surrender them would equate with being unfaithful to a sacred trust, a failure to pass on unimpaired to future generation of Christians, great necessities of faith and life which have been committed to their safekeeping. Their approach was one of organic unity of the church. To achieve such a

unity, agreement on ecclesiological issues would be necessary.<sup>40</sup> The discussions of unity in the missionary conferences in the mission fields rightly anticipated the future discussions in the Faith and Order Movement in the twentieth century.

There were also efforts to unite, in a close and organic union, churches belonging to the same ecclesiastical polity. The first instance of a union of Presbyterian churches in the mission field took place in Japan in 1877. Similar unions took place in China, India, Korea, British Central Africa and several other countries. In 1907, the Congregational and Presbyterian churches in South India came together to form the South India United Church. and the Centenary Missionary Conference in Shanghai in 1907 resolved to work towards the formation of a Christian Federation of China.

### **Contribution of 'Younger' Churches**

Although the missionary conferences were mainly concerned with the co-operation of missionaries and societies in the mission field, their discussions led to the wider question of the unity of the church. One of the most important reasons for such a development was the pressure exerted by 'younger' churches for unity. The Edinburgh report made this clear.

Not only is the ideal of a United Church taking more and more definite shape and color in the minds of foreign missionaries at work in non-Christian lands, but it is also beginning under the influence of the growing national consciousness in some of these countries, to capture the imagination of the indigenous Christian communities; for whom the sense of a common national life and a common Christianity is stronger than the appreciation of the differences which had their origin in controversies remote from the circumstances of the Church in mission lands. The influence of the national feeling is most powerful in China. <sup>41</sup>

The Edinburgh Conference was certainly right when it said that it was under the instigation of the national movement that Christians from the younger churches, especially Christians from Asia, began to develop a sense of a common national life and a common Christianity. "The first impulse for ecumenism in Asia had its origin in Asian nationalism in the



















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## **Chapter 2: Church and Mission**

In the nineteenth century there existed a separation between church and mission, which had disastrous consequences for both. It was in the mission field that this false situation had been greatly recognised. As a result of the separation of church and mission in missionary thinking, the only reality for both the missionaries and the Christians in the mission field, was mission. The missionaries in the field were representatives of a missionary society under the authority of that society; the majority of the Christians in the field belonged to a missionary society such as the Lutheran Missionary Society or the Church Missionary Society (CMS), and were not conscious of belonging to a church. Stephen Neill tells the story (probably an apocryphal one) of an Indian clergyman who went to London in the 19th century, looked at St. Paul's cathedral and asked whether it was a CMS or SPG church.<sup>1</sup> In the missionary thinking of the 19th century, there was no proper recognition of Christians in the mission field as belonging to a church of that country. The missionary historians treated the history of the church in Asia or Africa as part of the history of missionary societies and of western missionary expansion. As D.T. Niles once remarked, the churches in Asia or Africa, as far as the western missionary societies were concerned, were only dots on the missionary map. One sad result of treating Asian or African churches as part of western missionary expansion was that those churches did not develop an identity of their own with a sense of mission and were often burdened











Western organization. "The administrative independence of the Indian church cannot be effected by the imposition of a machinery essentially foreign in its conception and execution, but by making room for simpler and spontaneous organizations natural to the soil'.<sup>17</sup> They pleaded for the development of an Indian type of Christianity embodying Indian ideals.

Cheng Chung-Yi of China pointed out that to some, the indigenous church almost means the utopia of the Christian movement in the world. Others look upon it with a great deal of doubt and misgiving, fearing that the young church in the mission field may go astray, create something that is quite different from historical Christianity, and thus lose the essentials of Christian religion. "In our opinion", he said, "an indigenous Church is nothing more or less than a normal, healthy growth of the Christian Church of which Jesus Christ is the supreme Head. An indigenous church in the mission field is not essentially different from a normal Church in any other part of the world". He went on to say, "By indigenous church we mean a Christian church that is best adapted to meet the religious needs of the Chinese people, most congenial to Chinese life and culture and most effective in arousing in Chinese Christians the sense of responsibility". It is a church that is the natural outgrowth and expression of the corporate religious experience of Chinese Christians.<sup>18</sup>

From the point of view of the younger churches we cannot artificially create an indigenous church. Self-support, self-government, and self-propagation alone do not create an indigenous church. They are but some of the characteristics of an indigenous church. An indigenous church is the natural and spontaneous expression of the corporate religious experience of Christians in a particular place. In the history of the churches in India, China or Africa, a lot of time and effort has been spent in the twentieth century, in 'indigenisation of the church's life and devolution of missionary power'. This was so because of the false situation created by the separation of church and mission in missionary thinking. What the conference in Jerusalem discovered was that an indigenous church in Asia or Africa was not essentially different from any other church, in any other part of the world, of which Jesus Christ is the Head

In closing our discussion of the Conference in Jerusalem, we need to refer to a very significant statement made by Nathan Soderblom, the great ecumenical pioneer and architect of the Life and Work Movement.



the ecumenical movement.

At Jerusalem, it was the reality of the church in the mission field that forced the missionary movement to take seriously the 'church' in its thinking. But there were also other important social, political and ecumenical forces which influenced missionary thinking.

It was recognised in Edinburgh in 1910 that "the following ten years would in all probability constitute a turning point in human history and might be more critical in determining the spiritual revolution of humankind than many centuries of ordinary experience."<sup>20</sup> Undoubtedly they were, but scarcely as Edinburgh expected. Those ten years were to be fateful years for the world and the church - ten years which were to see the First World War, the Russian Revolution and the rise of Communism. These were the years that brought Marxist communism to China and to many other parts of the world.<sup>21</sup> The outbreak of the First World War marked the beginning of a new era. The tragic experience of being caught up in the irrationality and meaninglessness of war made people wonder whether life could really be explained in the easy, optimistic and evolutionary way that had come to be generally accepted in the preceding period.<sup>22</sup> Liberal theology in its various forms, which was in ascendancy in this period, seemed to have few answers to the agonising questions that were raised by the break down of civilisation. The missionary enterprise was beginning to realise the inadequacy of its own theological pre-suppositions.

In 1918 Karl Barth published his *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*. The new theological trend represented in this book was in part a reaction to the liberalism of the 19th century and a return to earlier protestant orthodoxy, especially to Calvin. To some extent, it was a product of the environment. As liberalism had reflected the optimism and humanism of the 19th century, so neo-orthodoxy<sup>23</sup>, to no small degree, arose from the pessimism and the despair begotten of the terrors of World War I. It emphasised human sinfulness and the inability, unaided, to discover God or to extricate oneself from the horrors brought by one's depravity.<sup>24</sup> One important feature of neo-orthodoxy was its emphasis on Biblical theology. The revival of Biblical theology brought to the forefront the centrality of the church in the divine economy. The 'church' itself became a theme of theological inquiry and discussion. This was in marked contrast to the situation of fifty or sixty years ago.<sup>25</sup> Biblical theology emphasised that the core of Biblical history is the story of the calling of a visible community to be God's people, His royal



regions where there was yet only a tiny Church and virtually all Christian work was still in the narrower sense 'missionary' work; in other quarters where it was felt that 'Church' meant an absorption in the problems of the ecclesiastical institutions. But it came to be generally agreed that nothing was so vital to the whole Christian movement as the consideration of the church itself, the faith by which it lives, the nature of its witness, the conditions of its life and extension, the relation it must hold to its environment, and the increase of co-operation and unity within it.<sup>28</sup>

So from the beginning it was determined that the central theme of the meeting should be the building up of the younger churches as a part of the historic universal Christian community. The subject of the meeting was dealt with under five main divisions: The faith by which the church lives, the witness of the church, the life and work of the church, the environment of the church, and co-operation and unity. Of these, two aspects received special attention at Madras, namely, the relationship between the Christian mission and non-Christian religions, and the rediscovery of the church as the agent of the evangel.

Whereas the theme in Jerusalem was The World Mission of Christianity, at Madras it was the World Mission of the Church. In the choice of this central theme, the missionary movement came into the same stream of thought as two other branches of the ecumenical movement, namely, the Faith and Order, and Life and Work movements. Both had held conferences in 1937 and at each the central theme was the 'church' having in view chiefly, but not exclusively, the older churches.<sup>29</sup> "In each of these great gatherings, less varied in race and nation than that of Tambaram but more varied in denomination and church tradition, there was to be discerned the sense that for the Christian cause all depends, under God, upon the life of the Christian community, the quality of its witness, the cogency with which within the varied and tumultuous life of man that community believes in and lives upon the power and wisdom of the Gospel".<sup>30</sup>

It was in confronting the younger churches in the mission field that Jerusalem came to face the reality of the church in missionary thinking. Although Madras announced at the outset that its purpose was to consider the building up of the younger churches, and although the Conference gave much thought to the development of younger churches,

it was the political, cultural and theological developments in Europe, and the concerns of the older churches, that influenced the thinking and assumptions of the Conference more than the situations of the younger churches. For example, its definition of the church, its nature and function was borrowed directly from the Faith and Order Conference at Edinburgh 1937.

Major subjects discussed at the Madras Conference were all related to 'the church'. From Madras on, the 'church' played an ever-increasing role in missionary thinking. Richey Hogg points out:

Madras made the church its central concern and a new sense of its reality runs through every statement produced there. As never before had been possible, the members of the churches saw the church universal partially disclosed in their midst. In a day when many regarded the historic church as an unnecessarily appendage to 'the Christian spirit', Madras brought a new awareness of the church's importance." 31

Speaking of the relevance of the church to the life of Christians and the spread of the Gospel, the Conference pointed out that in spite of all its past and present failures to live up to its divine mission, the church is, and remains, the fellowship to which our Lord has given promises, and through which He carries forward His purpose for humankind. This fellowship is not merely invisible and ideal, but real and concrete, taking definite form in history. It is, therefore, the duty of all disciples of Christ to take their place in the given Christian church, that is, one of those concrete bodies in which and through which the Universal Church of Christ, the world wide company of His followers, is seeking to find expression. The Conference went on to say:

It is the Church and the Church alone which can carry the responsibility of transmitting the Gospel from one generation to another, of preserving its purity and of proclaiming it to all creatures. It is the Church and Church alone which can witness to the reality that man belongs to God in Christ with a higher right than that of any earthly institution which may claim his supreme allegiance. It is within the Church and the Church alone that the fellowship of God's people receive together the gifts He offers to His children in Word and Sacrament.

We may and we should doubt whether the churches as they are do truly express the mind of Christ, but we may never doubt that Christ has a will for His Church, and that His promises to it holds good. If we desire to live according to that will and to become worthy of those promises we shall accept both the joy and the pain of membership in His Body.<sup>32</sup>

The Conference was convinced that Christian faith alone gives the vision and power that are essential for the resolution of the problems of our troubled world. God saves through Jesus Christ, is the Christian message. It is this message which is given to the church to proclaim. The report of the Conference reads:

To the gift of Christ, God has added the gift of His Holy Spirit in the Church. Christ's true Church is the fellowship of those whom God has called out of darkness into his marvelous light. The guidance and power of the spirit are given to this Church that it may continue Christ's saving work in the world. It seeks to build up its own members in the knowledge of Christ. For those that are without Christ the true Church yearns with the love of its master and Lord. It goes forth to them with the evangel of his grace. It practices his ministry of compassion and healing. It bears witness against every iniquity and injustice in their common life . To it is given the solemn privilege of entering into the fellowship of the suffering of Christ.

In spite of all the weakness and shortcomings of our churches, Christ's true Church is within them; and our hope for the redemption of mankind centres in his work through them. Through the nurture and discipline of the Church, Christian life comes to completion; in glad service within the fellowship of the Church, Christian devotion is perfected.<sup>33</sup>

The Conference called the churches to bear courageous and unflinching witness to the nations that the base purposes of people, whether individuals or of groups, cannot prevail against the will of the holy and compassionate God. The churches were urged to attack social evils at their roots. Above all, they were called to declare the Gospel of

compassion and pardon of God that people may see the light, which is in Jesus Christ, and surrender themselves to His service.

But the further summons of the Church is to become in itself the actualization among men of its own message. No one so fully knows the failings, the pettiness, the faithlessness which infect Church's life as we who are its members. Yet, in all humility and penitence, we are constrained to declare to a baffled and needy world that the Christian Church, under God, is its greatest hope. By faith, but in deep assurance, we declare that this body which God has fashioned through Christ cannot be destroyed.<sup>34</sup>

The main conclusion of the Madras Conference was that church and mission are inseparable. It said, "World evangelism is the God-given task of the Church. This is inherent in the very nature of the Church as the Body of Christ created by God to continue in the world the work which Jesus Christ began in His life and teaching, and consummated by His death and resurrection".<sup>35</sup> It is the church that is God's missionary to the world. So from Madras on, it was impossible to speak of mission without directly linking mission to the church. Further, in summoning the churches to become in itself the actualization among men of its own message, it appeared that Madras had identified the church with the Gospel. Hence the Conference at Madras could announce to a baffled and needy world that the Christian church was its greatest hope and that the church could not be destroyed. These were very bold and strong statements to make about the church and its place in the economy of salvation.

E. Stanley Jones, an American missionary working in India and a participant at the Madras Conference, immediately questioned this emphasis on the church in missionary thinking. He feared that the substitution of the church for the Kingdom of God might rob the missionary movement of the needed fires of imagination, enthusiasm, and self-criticism. From his experience in India as a missionary to the Hindus, he felt that the idea of the church was anathema to the Hindus. In an article for the *Christian Century* entitled, "Where Madras Missed its Way", he wrote:

In general the Madras Conference was great, but centrally and fundamentally the Conference missed its way. Why?

Because of its starting point - the Church. It began there and worked Out all its problems from the Church standpoint. Hence the confusion and hesitancy. The Church is a relativism. At its best it is so. When you work out from one relativism to other relativisms in human affairs, the result is bound to be confusion... Alongside of the pseudo-absolutes of the race as in Nazism, the state as in Fascism, the class in Communism, the Madras Conference put another pseudo-absolute, the religious community, the Church.<sup>36</sup>

According to Stanley Jones, Madras had no absolute conception from which it worked out its main problems. In his view, Jesus worked out His thinking from the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom is God's absolute order confronting human need. The Kingdom is absolute while the church is relative. The Kingdom is the end while the church is only the means. For Stanley Jones, one could not be a revolutionary in one's thinking and acting, if one started from the church. Then the Gospel becomes a limited one. "The conception, the Church, binds you in relativities and limitations," he wrote. The complaint of Stanley Jones was that while Jesus went about preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom, Madras went about preaching the gospel of the Church. He wrote, "Madras looked out and saw the Kingdom and the Church at the door, opened the door to the lesser and more obvious, the Church, and left the Kingdom at the door. So Madras missed the way".<sup>37</sup>

Stanley Jones's criticism deserved some attention. Henry P. Van Dusen of Union Theological Seminary, New York, in another article in the *Christian Century* entitled, "What Stanley Jones Missed at Madras" tried to answer the criticism of Jones.<sup>38</sup> Van Dusen pointed out that Stanley Jones was guilty of an 'elementary confusion of thought' in his discussion of Kingdom and Church. Jones presented the Kingdom and Church as though they were two antithetic or irreconcilable realities between which a choice must be made. He spoke as though Madras confronted them as alternatives and that it deliberately chose the Church and rejected the Kingdom. What Madras did, according to Van Dusen, was to affirm both the Kingdom and the Church.

Both have their indispensable places- the core of the Christian message and the normative ideal of a Christian society, and the essential instrument for the proclamation of that message and the realisation of that ideal, first

within its own life and then throughout the world. Madras nowhere said that our message is the Church. It attempts to redefine the Christian message in all its fullness and truth, with insistent and repeated stress upon the kingdom. And then it says that for the demonstration of this message to our world, not merely in speech but in act, the Church is, under God, the principal and indispensable instrument.<sup>39</sup>

Van Dusen explained that no individualistic Christianity, not even individualistic proclamation of the message of the Kingdom, could possibly save the world from false totalitarianism. He pointed out that the Oxford Conference of the Life and Work Movement in 1937 had made it clear that Christianity must confront false communities with the reality of the true community. "The true community must find incarnation in the Christian Church. And so, Christianity must come to the world both as a message and a movement".<sup>40</sup> Walter Marshall Horton of Oberlin, another participant at Madras supported Van Dusen, when he wrote in the *Christian Century* that, "whatever other sins my fellow delegates and I may be guilty of, we are not guilty of the one alleged by Stanley Jones' indictment".<sup>41</sup>

Another serious criticism of Madras came from Baez Camargo, a Mexican delegate to Madras, in an article he wrote in *World Dominion*. While granting that there was a degree to which the church had to reassert the divine source of its being and the transcendence of its God-given commission to the world, Camargo said that there was a very grave danger of overstressing this necessary emphasis. For him, Christianity was to be understood as a Christ-centred and not as a church-centred religion. He expressed the serious concern of the Protestant Christians in Latin America, where the Roman Catholic church had claimed infallibility, that a church-centric view of religion might tempt the protestant churches also to over emphasize its place.<sup>42</sup>

#### Whitby 1947

Within nine months after the Madras Conference, the Second World War broke out. It was a period of turmoil, destitution, suffering and change throughout the world. After the war, an enlarged meeting of the International Missionary Council took place in Whitby, Ontario in Canada in 1947. One hundred and twenty delegates from forty countries attended the meeting. The general theme of the Conference was: The

Christian Witness in a Revolutionary World. It was a very timely theme. It suggested that the church was facing not simply a post war period but a revolutionary situation. The survey of countries and churches showed a world in ferment. In the material destitution and physical hardship that was experienced throughout the world, especially in Germany, there was a sense of helplessness and hopelessness. Faced with such a world, Whitby proclaimed that there is no hope except in God, and that evangelism is the need of the hour. Unlike that of Madras and Jerusalem, the Conference in Whitby showed a spirit of optimism in the outcome of missionary enterprise that was similar to that of Edinburgh 1910, and of the early student Volunteer Movement. Speaking of the church's global evangelistic responsibility, the Conference said:

We have been burdened with the sense of two great needs - the desperate need of the world for Christ, and the unsatisfied yearning of Christ over the world....Yet when we consider the present extension of the Church, and the divine and human resources available, we dare to believe it possible that, before the present generation has passed away, the Gospel should be preached to almost all the inhabitants of the world in such a way as to make clear to them the issue of faith or disbelief in Jesus Christ. If this is possible, it is the task of the Church to see that it is done. <sup>43</sup>

At Whitby there was renewed emphasis on Christian fellowship and Christian unity. For the church in general, and for the missionary movement in particular, every geographical expansion of the war brought disruption and disaster. One notable thing during the war was that Christian fellowship across the nations remained unbroken. Whitby was possible because of the vivid reality of the ecumenical fellowship. John Mackay who was elected as chairman of the IMC at Whitby observed that it had been easier for the Christians of the warring nations to meet and confer with one another at the close of World War II, than it had been at the close of World War I. He said:

The reason is plain. The sense of the Church that was reborn at Oxford and the concrete experience of belonging to the world community of Christ, which was engendered at Madras, had their effect. It was thus easier for British and German Christians on the one hand, and for American and Japanese Christians on the other, to re-establish bonds

of friendship when the guns ceased to roar and the bombs to fall in the summer of 1945.<sup>44</sup>

Under the tragedies of war, Christians had been driven to realize as never before their oneness in Christ.

### *Partnership in Mission*

The theological understanding of the relationship between church and mission in Madras led to the development of the concept of partnership in Whitby. At the beginning of the Protestant missionary movement, mission was from the West to the East, from the "Christian" world to the "non-Christian" world. The great burden of Edinburgh was how to carry the Gospel to the non-Christian lands. The younger churches were only recipients of mission from the older churches. But even in Edinburgh there was a general recognition that "the Church of Christ in each nation or tribe is the supreme instrument for its complete evangelisation".<sup>45</sup> In Jerusalem, there was a greater recognition of the place of younger churches in mission. Jerusalem emphasised that mission and missionaries should be integrated with the indigenous churches. In many countries, the first half of the twentieth century was a period of 'devolution' in mission, where greater autonomy and greater responsibility were given to the younger churches. It was also emphasised that the younger churches should play a greater part in the task of evangelisation. It was possible for Jerusalem to state, "There is possible now a true partnership enabling the older churches in an ever increasing degree to work with, through or in younger". This partnership would enable the older and younger churches to face the unfinished task of evangelism with greater hope of success than ever before.

For Madras, the church was the agent of the evangel, and church and mission could not be separated. This meant that there was no church which was not a missionary church, and that the world mission was that of the whole church. Madras defined evangelism thus: "By evangelism, therefore, we understand that the Church Universal, in all its branches and through the service of all its members, must so present Christ Jesus to the world in the power of the Holy Spirit that men shall come to put their trust in God through Him, accept Him as the saviour and serve Him as Lord in the fellowship of His Church".<sup>46</sup>

Responsibility for mission rests with all the churches, old and young. The work to be done is so vast, so urgent and so important, that it calls

for all the resources of all the Christians in all parts of the world. "This work in this new day", said the Madras Conference, "must be undertaken by a partnership between the older and the younger churches, by a pooling of all resources and by cooperation of all the Christians".<sup>47</sup>

The subject, Partnership in Mission, became a serious concern at Whitby. In considering the material and human resources for mission, the emphasis of Whitby was co-ordination and united planning. The co-operation in evangelism was conceived not only for the sake of a deeper fellowship and the strength of witness it would provide, but as the only way to face a task of great magnitude and urgency. The Conference pointed out:

In facing a task too great for all the churches, we must learn new ways of working together. Wherever devotion to local or denominational loyalties, stand in the way of larger call of Christ, it must be transcended. Those who have abundance must be willing to make their wealth available for the churches that are in need. Where the pooling of resources promises more rapid advance, tradition must not be allowed to stand in the way. When new tasks are to be undertaken, Churches must be willing to consult together to take or share responsibility, as the will of God is revealed in answer to their faith and prayer.<sup>48</sup>

It was in this context of a common task, that Whitby faced the issue of the relationship between the older and younger churches and coined the slogan, "Partnership in Obedience". The often quoted statement of Whitby reads:

The task of world evangelism starts today from the vantage ground of a Church which, as never before, is really world wide.... It is working itself out today in a real partnership between the older and younger churches. The sense both of a common faith in Christ, and of a common responsibility for an immense and unfinished task, have brought us out of the mists of tension and re-adjustment to a higher level, from which we have been able to see our world task in a new perspective.<sup>49</sup>

Partnership in Obedience expressed the idea that the task of mission is a global task and is to be undertaken in partnership. The partnership is based on a common faith and obedience to a common task.

The partnership between the older and younger churches and new forms of mission were subjects of discussion again at the next meeting of the IMC at Willingen.

## **Willingen 1952**

By 1952, it seemed fairly certain that the period of Western domination over peoples of Asia and Africa was coming to an end. In the words of the Indian historian K.M. Panikkar, the Vasco da Gama era had come to an end. The Asian people had won their independence and the process of emancipation in Africa kept the continent in ferment. Along with national independence, there was also the revival of ancient religions of these people, such as Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam. The period also saw the beginning of every part of the world being drawn into the current of a single global civilization dominated by Western science and technology.

By the nineteen fifties, Christianity had become worldwide. In many cases the political emancipation of the countries from colonial rule had expedited the process of younger churches gaining independence from mission control. At this point, many felt that Western missionary activity overseas was coming to a close. Already the organization, methods and outlook of Western missions were subjected to intense criticism. The criticisms leveled against the Christian missions in China, by both Communists and many Chinese Christians alike, were aimed at their connections with Western civilization and Western imperialism in particular, and at their inability to foster the growth of a really dynamic and expanding Chinese Church.<sup>50</sup> Some of the missionary leaders were aware of this new situation. Max Warren of the Church Missionary Society, speaking at the Willingen Conference, made the following comparison with the previous meeting of the IMC at Whitby.

At Whitby, in 1947, we hoped that the most testing days of Christian mission, at least for our generation, lay behind us. With the promise of a 'Partnership in Obedience' and the summons to an expectant evangelism', we were eager and anxious to go out and buy the opportunities. I do not suggest that there was

anything facile in our outlook. We saw a long pull and a hard pull ahead but we looked forward, and for a moment we glimpsed the city 'set upon a broad field, full of good things'. But here in Willingen clouds and thick darkness surround the city, and we know with complete certainty that the most testing days of the Christian mission in our generation lie just ahead.<sup>51</sup>

In such a situation it was repeatedly asked whether there was any place for Western missions in the newly independent countries in Asia and Africa.<sup>52</sup> Thus the church was faced with the task of rethinking her missionary obligation. Hendrik Kramer had already indicated the need for it as early as 1938, when he wrote that the Church and all Christians "if they have ears to hear and eyes to see, are confronted with the question: What is its essential nature, and what is its obligation to the world?"<sup>53</sup>

At its meeting in 1948 at Oegstgeest in the Netherlands, the IMC committee authorized its research secretary, B.G.M. Sundkler, to initiate studies on the theological basis of missions. It was recognised that in the fields of Biblical and theological studies, there had been new insights and developments that needed to be taken seriously by the missionary movement. The committee felt that fundamental thinking was needed not only on the Biblical basis of missions but also in their practical application. Because of these considerations the general theme chosen for the Willingen Conference was: The Missionary obligation of the Church. This topic had been mentioned at the Whitby Conference, and the first Assembly of the World Council of Churches held at Amsterdam in 1948 had also used the 'church' as the central theme of its discussions. Two of the topics at Amsterdam had been : The Universal Church in God's Design, and The Church's Witness to God's Design, both of which were very closely related to the main theme at Willingen.

As soon as the main theme of the Willingen Conference was published, J.C. Hoekendijk, a Dutch theologian, in a paper in the *International Review of Missions*, voiced a strong protest against the church-centric view of missions.<sup>54</sup> The paper was communicated to all participants in the Conference for study.

In this paper he attributed all ills in the missionary movement to the church-centric thinking which had been developed during the previous two decades. As a result, he said missions had become church

extensions. He quoted J. Durr saying, "Mission is the road from the Church to the Church. But how can we be sure of being on the right road unless we know the right beginning and end of this road".<sup>55</sup> He pointed out that the missionary now hardly left the ecclesiastical sphere and for him, there was no life outside the church; consequently, he tried to define his surrounding world in ecclesiastical categories.

The world has almost ceased to be the world and is now conceived of as a sort of ecclesiastical training-ground. The Kingdom is either confined within the bounds of the Church or else it has become something like an eschatological lightening on the far horizon. The end of the earth and the end of time, these two eschata towards which the Mission is proceeding, are likely to become strangely identical. As soon as we get ready to move forward to these ends we see in both instances one and the same goal: the Church.<sup>56</sup>

In Hoekendijk's view, a keen ecclesiological interest was generally a sign of spiritual decadence. Ecclesiology has been a subject of major concern in the 'second generation'. In the 'first generation' in periods of revival, reformation or missionary advance, the interest of Christians had been absorbed by Christology and the thought patterns had been determined by eschatology. Hoekendijk blamed the Jerusalem and Madras conferences of the IMC for the tendency towards 'church-ism' in contemporary thinking. "On the one hand it seems to be the logical outcome of our own theories, while on the other it is forced upon us by the younger churches".<sup>57</sup> According to him:

To say that 'the Church is the starting-point and the goal of Mission' is after all only making a phenomenological statement. It may well be that we are so wrapped up in our church-centrism that we hardly realise any longer how much our ideas are open to controversy. Would it not be a good thing to start all over again in trying to understand what it really means when we repeat, again and again, our favourite missionary text, 'the Gospel of the Kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the *Oikoumene* - and attempts to re-think our ecclesiology within this framework of the kingdom -gospel-Apostolate-world?<sup>58</sup>

In his scheme, 'Kingdom - gospel- Apostolate - world', the world and





Willingen, which was called together with a church-centric theology of mission as its pre-supposition, was forced to seek the missionary mandate not from the nature of the Church but from the Triune God. It affirmed that the locus of missionary obligation is found in the nature of the Triune God, revealed in the work of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This is the ultimate ground for all missionary work. The Trinitarian pre-supposition does not deny or minimize the missionary obligation of the church. In fact, Willigen emphasised the 'total' missionary task of the church when it said, "God sends forth the Church to carry out His work to the ends of the earth, to all nations, and to every social, political and religious community of humankind. It is sent to proclaim Christ's reign in every moment and every situation. But the calling and obligation does not arise out of the church's self-existence, nor can it be derived self-evidently from the church's thinking about itself. It points back to the self-revealing activity of God, who is the author of both church and mission. "That by which the Church receives its existence is that by which it is also given its world mission".

The early church did not start with a doctrine of Trinity. In fact, in the New Testament we do not find a formally developed doctrine of Trinity. As Lesslie Newbigin pointed out, it was when the early church began to take the message of salvation through Jesus Christ out into the pagan world that it was compelled to articulate a fully Trinitarian doctrine of God whom it proclaimed. "It is indeed a significant fact that the great doctrinal struggles about the nature of the Trinity, especially about the mutual relations of the Son and the Father, developed right in the midst of the struggle between the Church and the pagan world. These Trinitarian struggles were indeed an essential part of the struggle between the Church and the Pagan world"<sup>62</sup> Newbigin points out that, by contrast to the early period, during the era of 'Christendom', the doctrine of the Trinity did not occupy a comparable place in the thought of the Christians. But, due to the missionary movement, the doctrine of the Trinity has again acquired an important place in the present century.

It is also significant that, when one goes outside the 'Christendom' situations to bring the Gospel to the non-Christians, one soon discovers that the doctrine of the Trinity is not something that can be kept out of sight; on the contrary, it is the necessary starting point of preaching.<sup>63</sup> According to Newbigin, the doctrine of the Trinity is the pre-supposition without which the preaching of the Gospel in a pagan world cannot begin.

In preparation for the Willingen Conference, there were study groups in North America working on the missionary obligation of the church. Their report also points out a parallel between the early church and the modern missionary movement in their understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity. After referring to the adoption of the Trinitarian definition of the Christian faith in 381 at Constantinople, the report states:

Surely it is no more coincidence that the church in the twentieth century has been searching its mind in ways which are strikingly parallel to those of the church during the first four centuries. It does not matter that there is still a long way to go. What matters is the direction of the search. The terms of the Church's message are different because the historical and cultural situation is different. But the ground and the framework of what the Church has to say in the world are the same and the cultural alternatives to Christianity in the modern world - humanism and syncretism, polytheism and totalitarianism - run back to strangely similar anticipations in Gnosticism and Stoicism, the mysteries and the Caesarism of the Hellenistic world. In a halting way but with a sure instinct for its place and its task in a changing world, the missionary movement has charted an increasingly articulate course from Edinburgh (1910) to Madras (1938)... From vigorous Christo-centricity to thoroughgoing Trinitarianism - this is the direction of missionary theology, missionary strategy and missionary obligation.<sup>64</sup>

Willingen's approach to a theology of mission was Trinitarian in character. The Triune God Himself is declared to be the sole source of every missionary enterprise. Essential in the missionary purpose of God is the sending of the Holy Spirit. God has created all things and all human beings. God has sent forth one Saviour, one Redeemer who by His death, resurrection and ascension has accomplished a full and perfect atonement, and created in Himself one new humanity. On the foundation of this accomplished work God has sent forth His Spirit, the Spirit of Jesus, to gather us together in one Body in Him, to guide us in to all truth, to enable us to worship the Father in spirit and truth, to empower us for the continuance of His mission as His witnesses and ambassadors, the first fruit and earnest of its completion. By the Spirit we are enabled both to press forward as ambassadors of Christ and also



*Missionary Council*", *International Review of Missions*, Vol. XXVII (January 1928), p. 6.

10. *The Relations Between the Younger and Older Churches. Report of the Jerusalem Meeting of the International Missionary Council*, Vol. III, London, Oxford University Press, 1928. p. 3.

11. *Report of the Jerusalem Meeting*, Vol. III. pp 3-4.

12. Basil Mathews, *Road to the City of God*, New York, Double day, 1929. p.53.

13. *Report of the Meeting of the International Missionary Council*, Vol. III, pp 12-13.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 165.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 209.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 208.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 208.

17. *Ibid.*, pp. 51-52.

18. *Ibid.*, pp. 171.

19. *Ibid.*, pp. 134-135.

20. *World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh 1910*, Vol. VIII, p. 196.

21. *Ibid.*, pp. 131-158.

22. Vidler, *Op.cit.* p. 212.

23. The Barthian Theological Movement has gone by different names: Theology of Crisis; The Dialectical Theology; Theology of the Word; The Neo-Orthodoxy.

24. The impact of social tragedy upon sensitive minds from 1914 on is

well represented by Paul Tillich's testimony concerning his experience as a German chaplain in World War I. During the Battle of Champagne in 1915, there was a night attack in which many of his personal friends were wounded or killed. "All that horrible long night", he says, "I walked along the rows of dying men, and much of my German classical philosophy broke down that night - the belief that man could master cognitively the essence of his being, the belief in the identity of essence and . -. the traditional concept of God was dead". Quoted by Marshall Horton, Stephen Neill (eds.), *Twentieth Century Christianity*. p. 275.

25. It is suggested that to get an idea of the liberal temper that pervaded the early twentieth century, one need only to read A. Hamack's book, *What is Christianity?* (London: William's & Northgate, 1901). In this book, it is said that the church is portrayed as a kind of cancerous growth in the pure Gospel of Jesus Christ..

26. J.H. Oldham (ed.), *The Oxford Conference*, Chicago, Willet, Clark & Company, 1937. pp 45-52.

27. *The World Mission of the Church: Findings and Recommendations of the Meeting of the International Missionary Council, Madras, 1938*. p. 7.

28. *Ibid.*.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

30. *Ibid.*.

31. Richey Hogg, *Ecumenical Foundations*, New York, Harper Brothers, 1952. pp. 297-298.

32. *The World Mission of the Church*, *Op.cit.* pp. 28-29.

33. *Ibid.*, pp. 17-18.

34. *Ibid.*, p.19.

35. *Ibid.* p. 41.

36. *The Christian Century*, Vol. LVI, March 1939. p. 351.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 352.

38. *The Christian Century*, Vol. LVI, March 29, 1939

39. *Ibid.*. p. 411.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 410.

41. *The Christian Century*. Vol. LVI, April 19, 1939- p. 517.

42. *World Dominion*, Vol. XVII, April 1939, p. 127.

43. R.W. Ranson, *Renewal and Advance*, London, Edinburgh House Press, 1948. p. 215.

44. John A. Mackay, *Ecumenics: The Science of the Church Universal*, Englewood Cliffs, Prentice - Hall, Inc. 1964. p. 11.

45. *Edinburgh Conference, Report of the Commissions I*, p. 343.

46. *The World Mission of the Church*, 1938, p. 33.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 37

48. Ranson, *Op.cit.*, p. 215.

49. *Ibid.*.

50. Arend Th. Van Leeuwen, *Christianity in World History*, London, Edinburgh House Press, 1964, p. 381.

51. M.A.C. Warren, 'The Christian Mission and the Cross'. in Norman Goodall (ed.), *Missions Under the Cross*, London, Edinburgh House Press, 1953, p.40.

52. Van Leeuwen, *Op.cit.*, p. 17.

53. Hendrik Kramer, *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World*, New York, Harper & Brothers, 1938, p.1.

54. J.C. Hoekendijk, "*The Church in the Missionary Thinking*", *International Review of Missions* Vol. XLI, July 1952, pp. 324-336.
55. *Ibid.*.
56. *Ibid.*.
57. *Ibid.*, p. 325.
58. *Ibid.*, pp. 332-333.
59. *Ibid.*, p. 334.
60. *Ibid.*, p. 336.
61. Norman Goodall (ed), *Op.cit.*, pp. 189-190.
62. Lesslie Newbigin, *Trinitarian Faith and Today's Mission*, Richmond, Virginia, John Knox Press, p. 32.
63. *Ibid.*, p. 33.
64. *Why Missions ?* North American Report on Aim of the Missionary Obligation of the Church, pp. 4-6.

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# **Edinburgh to Salvador: Twentieth** **Century Ecumenical Missiology by** **T.V. Philip**

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## **Chapter 3: Mission and Unity**

The necessary relationship between the unity of the church and the mission of church has not always been apparent, or recognised, in the history of the Christian church. It was by no means present as a major factor at the beginning of the protestant missionary movement. Yet, the nineteenth century missionary movement, though not in aim, was ecumenical in result. Though there was a separation of church and mission in nineteenth century missionary thinking and practice, they moved steadily closer in the twentieth century, and by the Willingen Conference in 1952, the missionary movement had come to realize the inseparable relationship between church and mission.

As a result of this theological discovery, there grew within the missionary movement a greater recognition that the mission of the church and the unity of the church belong together. As the church and mission began to encounter each other and move closer, there developed within the missionary movement, the convictions and impulses for Christian unity. The Willingen Conference, which adopted a statement on the missionary calling of the church, also adopted a statement on the calling of the church to mission and unity. Several factors contributed to this development, including developments in the mission field and the pressure from the younger churches for unity, experiences of the churches in Europe during the two world wars, the political situation in the West, the theological developments in Europe, and the ecumenical



While we are profoundly thankful for the growth in brotherly love and understanding that has come with increased co-operation, and while we are convinced of the need for its yet further extension, there are certain parts of the Christian obligation which in our judgement demand more than a co-operative basis. In particular it has been found that in most cases co-operation in the great evangelistic task stops at the point where pastoral care is needed for the building up of the Church. We can act together in the presentation of the Gospel to men and in winning of them to the Christian faith; but there is evidence that in the next necessary stage co-operation breaks down owing to divided church loyalty. From this stand point therefore, as well as from the growing spirit of unity that has resulted from common working at a common task, has come in many fields a deep and growing conviction that the spirit of God is guiding the various branches of His Church to seek for the realization of a visible and organic union.<sup>2</sup>

At the Willingen conference in 1952. F.W. Dillistone spoke of the work of the Holy Spirit in communicating and in creating community. The story of Pentecost records that it was through the Spirit that the apostles were able to communicate to people of all nations the wonderful works of God. The story ends with the description of a community knit together by the Spirit into a common life in which natural divisions and barriers were transcended. <sup>3</sup> Mission and unity came from the same source and so are intimately related. It is the Spirit which guides the church in its missions, exposing new emptiness, new brokenness which awaits the fulfilling and reconciling ministrations of the Word of God in Christ. "The Gospel cannot be preserved in amber", Dillistone said; "it must be communicated in the power of the spirit. Again through the spirit the community is being built up. The church is the community of the spirit and the spirit enables the church to become increasingly conformed to the pattern of the Son whose Body the Church is and whose representative it is in the world". The community cannot be enclosed within an institutional framework of this world; it must stretch ever upwards in the power of the Spirit, in order that it may be conformed to the image of the Son and filled with all the fullness of God.

As a warning to the churches, Dillistone pointed out that churches often

lose sight of the true pattern of their existence. They avail themselves of energies which are not those of the Holy Spirit. They are continually beset by temptations which assailed the Messiah - to live by material things rather than by the Word of God, to seek the cheap success of the market place rather than the "well-done" of the heavenly king, to establish an empire by force and fear rather than to win the nations by sacrificial love. They are always in danger of narrowing the pattern of the church's vocation until it is conceived in terms of an exaggerated asceticism or of a mechanical sacramentalism or of an inflexible clericalism. At the same time, they are also in danger of limiting the Spirit's energies within the channels of a particular emotional experiences stereotyped pattern of behavior, or a specific intellectual formulation. "A very Imperfect knowledge of church history is sufficient to teach us how real these dangers have been in the life of the on going Church. Time and again, prophets and reformers have arisen to recall the Church to its true pattern as the Body of the Messiah and to its true energy in the dunamis of the spirit, but as often as not the prophet has been either rejected or ignored".

At Willingen, speaking on the Great Commission, John A. Mackay brought to the attention of the Conference two concerns of the Christian church. "The whole church", he said, "corporately and individually must be concerned about world-wide Christianity, and, at the same time be committed to missionary action on a world front". He warned the church of those who were simply missionary enthusiasts without a concern for the community or of those who, enamoured of order, made orderliness an end in itself. For Mackay, unity is for mission and the whole church should become mission.

The Church simply cannot be the Church in any worthy sense if it is not loyal to its apostolate. A truly apostolic Church can never be satisfied with merely sponsoring missionary interest or in giving birth to 'missions'. It must itself become the mission. Let the Church be the Mission. The whole Church must be girded for action.<sup>6</sup>

According to him, when the Christian church as a whole recovers a sense of missionary responsibility, certain things happen. Christian thought becomes concerned not merely with a theology of missions, but with a theology of mission. The role of the missionary society and the meaning of missionary vocation will be re-thought. The spontaneous expansion of the church will be regarded as the natural thing to hope for

and to promote. The risks attending such expansion will be calculated and accepted. Missionary ardor will not be curbed until perfect ecclesiastical order has been established or assured. Witness to the Gospel will not be made to wait upon a fully trained ministry.<sup>7</sup>

The Willingen Conference adopted a statement on the calling of the Church to mission and unity. The conference acknowledged that the calling of the church to mission and unity arises out of the nature of God Himself made known to us in Christ. In Christ we see God's redemptive action; in Christ God is still at work reconciling all things to Himself in one restored humanity. Christ called the apostles to share with Him His mission for the redemption of the world. The calling of the church is to be in them and make known to the whole world, in word and deed, His Gospel of the Kingdom. Then the statement said:

The love of God in Christ calls for the three-fold response of worship, unity and mission. These three aspects of the Church's response are interdependent; they become corrupted when isolated from each other. Division in the Church distorts its witness, frustrates its mission, and contradicts its own nature. If the Church is to demonstrate the Gospel in its life as well as in its preaching, it must manifest to the world the power of God to break down all barriers and to establish Church's unity in Christ. Christ is not divided.<sup>8</sup>

When the World Council of Churches (WCC) was formed (by the coming together of the Life and Work and Faith and Order movements in 1948), the International Missionary Council (TMC) did not join it. But by the time of Willingen, the International Missionary Council was becoming aware of its role and place in the ecumenical movement as a whole, as well as its responsibility to it. The statement on mission and unity acknowledged that through the ecumenical movement, God draws His people together in order to overcome the barriers of division which are a hindrance to effective Christian witness. The statement called on the member councils of the International Missionary Council to further the cause of Christian unity and to consider fresh ways of relating their experience and concern for unity to the deliberations and actions of the churches within their membership, and to the Commission on Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches.

At the time when the missionary movement was discovering the church

and its unity in relation to mission, a similar movement was taking place in the Life and Work Movement. The Life and Work Movement, whose aim was to unite the churches in Christian social responsibility, became increasingly aware of the need for the church to be true to itself. It was the conviction at the World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh that the goal of carrying the Gospel to the world could best be achieved by concentrating on this common purpose and excluding doctrinal and ecclesiastical differences from considerations. Similarly, at the first meeting of the Life and Work Movement in Stockholm 1925, it was assumed that the way to get ahead in discharging Christian responsibility in social matters was to work together without worrying about the faith and order issues which separated the churches. The slogan at that time was, 'doctrine divides but service unites'. However, the 1930s saw the emergence of the totalitarian states in Europe, particularly in Germany and Italy. This situation gave the main direction to the activities of the Life and Work Movement. The totalitarian governments were exercising, over the wills of the people, an absolute authority that denied any prior responsibility to God. In Germany, attempts were made to make religious institutions and doctrines subservient to a concept of life which was essentially pagan and secular. Hence the theme of the second Conference of Life and Work at Oxford in 1937 was Church, Community and State.<sup>9</sup> The one fact, which stands out so prominently in the report of the Conference, is the central place given to the church. While the message of the first Conference at Stockholm emphasised the personal responsibility of the individual Christian in doing God's will in society, the Oxford Conference emphasised the function of the church as an organized body. It said, "The first duty of the Church, and its greatest service to the world is that it be in very deed the Church-confessing true faith, committed to the fulfillment of the will of Christ ... and united in Him in a fellowship of love and service".<sup>10</sup> Speaking of the rediscovery of the church at Oxford, Samuel M. Cavert, the then secretary of the Federal Council of Churches in the United States said

It was the Oxford Conference on Life and Work in 1937, however, focussed on Church, Community and State, which was most important in giving American Christians a deepened appreciation of the church. After Oxford, the social Gospel began to have a new orientation. The church now came to be viewed not as an instrument of social welfare and the reform of secular society, but as a God-given community, transcending divisions of nation,

race and class and providing visible evidence of what God means society as a whole to be. Probably the strongest influence of Oxford upon American society was to make it more Church-centred.<sup>11</sup>

The key phrase at Oxford was, 'Let the Church be the Church'. It was this appreciation of the church, as a God-given community and therefore a central aspect of the Christian Gospel, which caused the Oxford Conference to appoint a committee to explore, with the Faith and Order Movement, the possibility of forming a World Council of Churches. The Faith and Order Movement, which had its second conference in 1937 at Edinburgh,<sup>12</sup> made a similar decision, which finally led to the formation of the World Council of Churches in 1948. As mentioned earlier, a factor which was prominent in the 1930s, and which influenced both the movements in forming the World Council of Churches, was a conviction about the universal church as against the national church. The new situation, which arose for the church as a result of the emergence of totalitarian doctrines in Europe, reinforced the conviction that the challenge must be answered by a total response of the whole church and that the ecumenical task must be conceived as a single whole. The new and violent nationalism, with its demand for a nationalized church wholly subservient to the state, brought out more clearly than before the great spiritual dangers inherent in the idea of a purely national church without any sense of solidarity with each other.<sup>13</sup> The only remedy in such a situation was a new affirmation and manifestation of universality as an essential character of the church. Such considerations led to a theological discovery of the church and its unity in many circles at the same time. It became increasingly clear that the chief objective in the ecumenical movement should not be simply to create a sense of spiritual unity between the Christians, or to facilitate co-operation between churches; rather, it was to demonstrate the true nature of the church in its oneness, and in its apostolic and prophetic witness. In 1936, J.H. Oldham wrote, "The more deeply the present situation in the world is studied, the clearer becomes the necessity for a deeper understanding of the ecumenical nature of the church".<sup>14</sup> It was this theological conviction, among other reasons, that the universal nature of the church needed to be manifested, that led to the formation of the World Council of Churches.

At the Amsterdam meeting in 1948, two of the three great streams of the ecumenical movement merged to form the World Council of Churches. The third, the missionary movement as represented by the International

Missionary Council did not join World Council of Churches at that time. The International Missionary Council was eventually integrated with the World Council of Churches at the New Delhi Assembly of the World Council of Churches in 1961, after a prolonged period of discussion. The main ecumenical discussion on the relationship between mission and unity took place within the context of the integration of the two bodies.

### **International Missionary Council - World Council of Churches Relationship**

Although the International Missionary Council did not join the World Council of Churches in 1948, the relationship between the two bodies was uppermost in the minds of those within the ecumenical movement. The International Missionary Council was very closely related to the work of the Faith and Order, and Life and Work Movements. John R. Mott, J.H. Oldham and William Paton, who were the leaders of the International Missionary Council, were also involved in the work of the other two movements. William Temple, John R. Mott, William Adams Brown, J.H. Oldham, William Paton, Visser't Hooft, and several others who were instrumental in the formation of the World Council of Churches, were deeply committed to the world mission of the church and their ecumenical vision was quickened, if not created, through it. These leaders of the ecumenical movement were seriously concerned about the World Council of Churches - International Missionary Council relationship.<sup>15</sup> Accordingly, from the very beginning, measures were devised to assure the fullest possible co-operation of the two bodies. Even before the formation of the World Council of Churches, a joint committee of the International Missionary Council and the Provisional Committee of the World Council of Churches was established in 1938 with John R. Mott as chairman. The appointment of the Joint Committee proved to be of considerable significance for the future relationship of the two bodies. After the war, at its meeting in 1946, the Joint Committee recommended several common projects between the International Missionary Council and the Provisional Committee of the World Council of Churches. The Committee also pleaded for steps to be taken to quicken the mission-consciousness of the churches, and the church-consciousness of missions, and to make clear the complementary character of the two Councils in the ecumenical movement.<sup>16</sup> This was the background against which successive steps in closer collaboration were taken.

At the first Assembly of the World Council of Churches at Amsterdam (1948), the two bodies voted formal association and modified their official titles to read : The World Council of Churches in association with the International Missionary Council, and conversely.<sup>17</sup> A number of joint activities followed. At the Bangkok Conference sponsored by the two bodies in 1949, a joint East Asia Secretariat was created to represent the two Councils in East Asia. As time passed, the two organizations took every opportunity to integrate their work at every point they could.

In 1956, the Joint Committee presented, to both organizations, a statement tracing the history of the association of the two bodies and offering the Committee's conviction that the time had come for the World Council of Churches and International Missionary Council to consider afresh the possibility of integrating the two Councils.<sup>18</sup> In the same year, the Joint Committee prepared a draft plan of integration, with a booklet entitled : Why Integration 2, to be presented to the World Council of Churches Central Committee Meeting in 1957 and the Ghana Assembly of the International Missionary Council in 1957-58.<sup>19</sup> The plan sought to ensure that the missionary conviction and commitment that were the very being of the International Missionary Council should permeate the entire life of the World Council of Churches and that the life and programme of the International Missionary Council should continue in its full scope and strength in the integrated Council. 20 At the Central Committee Meeting of the World Council of Churches in Yale in 1957, W.A. Visser't Hooft in his General Secretary's Report, dealing with the question of integration of the two Councils, stressed the fact that unity and mission were the central issues of the ecumenical movement. He said:

It has been asked from where the pressure comes for the integration of the two world bodies. The main answer must be from the heart of the ecumenical movement itself. As a leader of a younger church in Asia said the other day, 'if the World Council of Churches does not take mission seriously, it is not worthy of its name'. We owe it to the Younger Churches, which join the Council, to provide for them an ecumenical milieu in which the missionary calling pervades the whole atmosphere. We owe it to the Older Churches to maintain in our whole life the pressure of the greatest of all callings. And the World Council of Churches as a whole needs the experience and

insight of the historic missionary movement. 21

The question of the integration of the International Missionary Council and the World Council of Churches was the main consideration of the Ghana Assembly of the International Missionary Council which met from December 28, 1957 to January 8, 1958. At the Assembly, voices were raised both for and against integration. Some feared that integration would identify the missionary movement with a single conception of unity and a rigid ecclesiasticism. Others feared that the mission of the International Missionary Council would be lost in the World Council of Churches. Several speakers expressed concern about the possible divisive effect on the member councils of the International Missionary Council. It was pointed out that this danger existed especially in Africa and Latin America where the membership of certain councils had prevented their joining the International Missionary Council because of its association with World-Council of Churches. For different reasons, the Orthodox churches viewed with apprehension the closer relationship between the International Missionary Council and the World Council of Churches. They feared that the integration might, lead to the proselytizing activities of the evangelical missionaries among the Orthodox, and also lead to the alteration of the basis of the World Council of Churches. At the Ghana Assembly, the Metropolitan James of Melita (the then representative of the ecumenical Patriarch at the World Council of Churches office in Geneva) read a statement on the Orthodox view of the integration, pointing out that the Orthodox churches would not support any move to change the constitution of the World Council of Churches. However, for the majority of the delegates, the integration was the only appropriate outcome of the past development. There was very strong support for integration from the Councils of Asia and North America. Asian Councils had long looked for integration and felt that the International Missionary Council and the movement it represented belonged to a pattern of international relationship which was quickly disappearing. After long deliberations, the Ghana Assembly resolved that:

The Ghana Assembly of the International Missionary Council, having reviewed the steady growth of the relationship of association between the International Missionary Council and the World Council of Churches and having considered with care the opinions of delegates and those of the Christian Councils whose views have been presented, accepts in principle the integration of the

two Councils, and desires further steps to be taken towards this goal. <sup>22</sup>

The Assembly authorized the Administrative Committee of the International Missionary Council to take steps to implement the resolution. As a result, the two Councils became one at the Third Assembly of the World Council of Churches at New Delhi in 1961.

The fundamental reason behind the integration was not merely historical accident but the growth of certain theological convictions in the life of the two movements. Franklin Fry, chairman of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches emphasized this at the Ghana Assembly when he said that 'the union of the two groups is not only natural but is called for by theological consistency'.

### **Ecumenical Discussions on Unity and Mission**

The problems dealt with by early missionary conferences were problems of co-operation, comity, collaboration and consultation. These were the main burdens of the Edinburgh World Missionary Conference. This initial stage was followed by the problem of the dichotomy between church and mission. When mission was understood as the mission of the church, the question of the relationship between mission and unity of the church arose. The formation of the World Council of Churches in 1948, with its emphasis on the unity of the church and its mission, had awakened both the churches and the missionary movement to the realization that the whole church with the whole Gospel was responsible to the whole world. Serious discussion on the unity and mission was started in the ecumenical movement with the declaration drawn up by the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches at its meeting in Rolle, Switzerland in 1951.<sup>23</sup> One of the main subjects on the agenda of the Committee was : The Missionary and Ecumenical Calling of the Church. At the meeting, both John A. Mackay and Norman Goodall from the International Missionary Council made a critical observation that the title given to the discussion theme was a missionary misnomer since "missionary and ecumenical belong together and are complementary and that it is not legitimate to appropriate the term 'ecumenical' for those efforts which are working primarily for unity". Accordingly, the report which came out of the discussions at Rolle was entitled. "The Calling of the Church to Mission and Unity". <sup>24</sup>

The report was divided into five sections. In the first section it pointed

out that though church and mission could not be separated, they denoted, in the minds of many Christians, two different kinds of institutions. The problem had taken on a new shape with the separate development of the International Missionary Council and the World Council of Churches as two distinct organizations. Further, it was not possible to say that the International Missionary Council simply represented the calling of the church to evangelism and the World Council of Churches its calling to unity. The situation was much more complex.

On the one hand the missionary movement had been, from the beginning, imbued with a deep sense of calling for unity. On the other hand, the movement for unity had been, from the beginning, concerned with the church's witness to the world. There was a danger that the World Council of Churches, after leaving the missionary concern to another body, might become an affair for ecclesiastics concerned with the church itself. For the same reason the World Council of Churches was already rejected by considerable bodies of Christians who, in the name of missionary concerns, refused to be bound up with a Council of Churches.<sup>25</sup>

In the second section, the document drew attention to the confusion that existed in the use of the word, 'ecumenical', and insisted that this word, which comes from the Greek word for the whole earth, was previously used to describe everything that related to the whole task of the whole church to bring the Gospel to the whole world. It covered equally the missionary movement and the movement towards unity. The third section dealt with the Biblical basis for the church's unity and apostolicity. According to the Rolle declaration the true relation between the church's mission and the obligation to be one, can be found only as we return to Christ Himself. It said:

The division in our thought and practice between 'Church' and 'Mission' can be overcome only as we return to Christ Himself, in whom the Church has its being and its task, and to a fresh understanding of what He has done, is doing and will do. God's eternal purpose is to sum up all things in Christ'. According to this purpose He has reconciled us to Himself and to one another through the Cross and has built us together into a habitation of God in the spirit. In reconciling us to Himself in Christ, He has at the same time made us His

ambassadors beseeching others to be reconciled to Him. He has made us members in the Body of Christ, and that means we are both members of one another and also committed thereby to partnership in His redeeming mission.<sup>26</sup>

The church's unity and apostolicity rest upon the whole redemptive work of Christ - past, present and future; upon His finished work on the cross, His continuing work as the risen Lord, and upon His promise that He will come again. The document related the unity and mission of the church thus:

Thus the obligation to take the Gospel to the world, and the obligation to draw all Christ's people together both rest upon Christ's work and are indissolubly connected. Every attempt to separate those tasks violates the wholeness of Christ's ministry to the world. Both of them are, in the strict sense of the word, essential to the being of the Church and the fulfillment of its function as the Body of Christ.<sup>27</sup>

The rest of the document dealt with the implications of the recognition of the relation between unity and mission for the life of the church, for the world missionary task and the relationship between the International Missionary Council and the World Council of Churches.

The statement of Rolle was of great historical significance as it influenced the subsequent ecumenical discussions on unity and mission which finally led to the integration of the International Missionary Council and the World Council of Churches. Rolle made it clear that mission and unity were interrelated as both had their source in the work of Christ, however, it did not say how they were related. Many questions were left unanswered. In July 1952, the Joint Committee of the International Missionary Council and World Council of Churches circulated a letter to the members of the International Missionary Council and the member churches and commissions of the World Council of Churches raising further questions and asking for advice:

The problem on which we need more light is this: It is clear in the New Testament that the Church is called at the same time to proclaim the Gospel to the whole world and manifest in and to that world the fellowship and unity

which is in Christ. These two aspects of the calling of the church are interdependent. But in our theological thinking and in the life of our Churches these two callings have often been separated, so that some tend to emphasize the first and some the second. In our time through the growth of the younger churches, through a discovery of our evangelistic task in many countries, the Spirit makes us aware of the great need to grasp and clarify the essential connection between the missionary function of the Church (its apostolate) and its obligation to be one (its catholicity). Can we articulate clearly how these two are related to each other; and can we express in the life of our own congregations, our Churches and our ecumenical movement this fundamental unity ?

Some questions which arise in this connection are: How far is the *Una Sancta* of the creed instrumental; how far an end in itself ? Are the Churches, means or ends ? Should the centre of the theology of missions be the Kingdom of God, or the Church or both ? In how far is unity a condition for the effective witness of the Church ? And what form should unity take in order to strengthen the Christian witness ? What does the Christian hope in the victory of Christ mean for our attitude to and expectation concerning the missionary task of the Church? And what does that hope imply for our attitude to and expectation concerning the realization of the Christian unity in

history ?<sup>28</sup>

The Joint Committee's letter raised a number of important theological issues concerning the relationship between unity and mission. Subsequent ecumenical meetings tried to answer some of the questions noted in the letter. The Willingen meeting of the International Missionary Council in 1952 considered the question of mission and unity and issued a statement under the title, *Calling of the Church to Mission and Unity* (the same title as that of Rolle) more or less ratifying the statement of Rolle. Shortly afterwards the same theme was considered at the Lund Conference (1952) of the Faith and Order Movement. There is little evidence to show that previous Faith and Order conferences had attempted to link the nature of the church to the mission of the church. J.H.Nichols wrote, "The faith and order

movement has sometimes tended to proceed as if one could deal with the abstract essence of the one Church, could argue about and perhaps determine the true nature, without what it does".<sup>29</sup> However, the Lund conference gave consideration to the world mission of the church and its relation to unity. In his address to the conference, Henry Smith Leiper said, "And because of what we have seen of the dependence of the world mission on the Church, we who have had active service in the mission field know that as truly as a world mission without an urge to unity is unthinkable, a Christian Church without a consciousness of world mission ought to be also unthinkable".<sup>30</sup> He then added, "an ecumenical movement without a sense of world mission to spread that community is a complete anomaly. Today it would be an anachronism".<sup>21</sup>

The Lund conference emphasized that unity was sought for the sake of mission. In its statement, the conference said, "the nature of the unity towards which we are striving is that of a visible fellowship in which all members, acknowledging Jesus Christ as living Lord and Savior, shall recognize each other as belonging fully to His Body, to the end that the world may believe".<sup>32</sup> More important than the statement was the decision at Lund to include in the Constitution of the Faith and Order Commission the responsibility of the Commission to keep before the World Council of Churches and the member churches the urgency for evangelism. The first function of the Faith and Order Commission was stated as being, "to proclaim the essential oneness of the Church of Christ and to keep prominently before the World Council and the Churches, the obligation to manifest that unity and its urgency for the work of evangelism".<sup>33</sup>

Half a year later, the subject of mission and unity was discussed at the East Asia Study Conference held in Lucknow (India) in 1952. At the conference, D.G. Moses, an ecumenical leader from India, pointed out that the mission and unity, the apostolicity and catholicity of the church were two aspects of one single entity, like the two sides of a coin. He said, "The mission of the church without unity can never be the full and obedient fulfillment of the mission which Lord of the Church entrusted to it. And the unity of the Church apart from a more vigorous, bold and adventurous witnessing to the truth of the Gospel, is a dead unity, something that is splendidly null and beautifully void".<sup>34</sup> At the same conference, D.T. Niles observed that unity was never a strategy for mission but was a part of the mission itself.

Further thought was given to the subject at the Second Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Evanston, 1954. The Report of the section on 'Our Oneness in Christ and Our Disunity as Christians' states:

But all this [unity in the one Lord of the Church] cannot be asserted without understanding that the unity given to the Church in Christ, and gifts given to the Church to help and enable it to manifest its given unity, are not for the sake of the Church as an historical society, but for the sake of the world. The Church has its being and its unity in the 'Son of Man', who came not to be ministered unto, but to minister and to give His life a ransom for many. The being and the unity of the Church belong to Christ and therefore to His mission, and to His enduring the cross for the joy that was set before Him. Christ wrought 'one new man' for us all by His death, and it is by entering into His passion for the redemption of a sinful and divided world that the Church finds its unity in its crucified and risen Lord <sup>35</sup>

In what way are unity and mission related ? Evanston pointed out that both mission and unity have a common source in Christ. The unity and the being of the church belong to Christ and therefore to His mission. It is by participating in Christ's redemptive mission to the world that the church find its unity in Christ.

This issue was discussed further at the Ghana Assembly of the International Missionary Council in 1957/58. Discussion of Mission and Unity at the Ghana Assembly was specifically in the context of the integration of the two Councils. The Joint Committee of the International Missionary Council and World Council of Churches recommended the integration for the theological reason that mission and unity belonged together and theological consistency required that the two world bodies become one.<sup>36</sup> There were oppositions to the integration at the meeting. The critics pointed out that, mission and unity belonging together said something about the relationship between church and mission and not about the relationship of the World Council of Churches (which was not a church) and the International Missionary Council (which was not a mission). It did not necessarily involve the administrative unity of the two organizations. They further pointed out that the integration would lead to a dangerous concentration of power in

the World Council of Churches. Max Warren said that many were suspicious of the World Council of Churches on the grounds that it was on the way to becoming a 'super church'. He concluded his statement by saying, "I think, I shall give my vote for integration with sadness of heart and the deepest misgivings because I cannot see clearly that it is the leading of the Holy Spirit".<sup>37</sup> F. Berkeli (formerly the mission secretary of the Lutheran World Federation) of Norway agreed with Max Warren and voiced the same apprehension about the administrative unity of the two councils. For him too, the fact that the church is mission, did not translate to administrative union in Geneva.<sup>38</sup> Still others pointed out that the World Council of Churches stood for a monolithic conception of unity and that it had a weak theological basis.<sup>39</sup>

For some of the participants of evangelical persuasion, though mission and unity belonged together, unity was not an essential condition for mission. Again it was Max Warren who brought this fact to the attention of the Assembly. He pointed out that church history and contemporary society provided evidence that mission could be fulfilled without unity. He said that the most active groups in mission at that time were the Pentecostals and the Roman Catholics, neither of whom were notable in their concern for unity.

Those are two groups who never ask about mission but get on with it. But we spend conference after conference asking what it is, and setting up committees to tell us, while they are spreading forth. This is one of the tragedies of the present situation to which we ought to address ourselves. We are paralyzed while they go from strength to strength. Is God saying something to his Church which is disturbing to its very foundation ?<sup>40</sup>

He said that it is a *non sequitur* in the light of the whole history of the church to say that mission cannot be promoted without unity. According to Max Warren, it is only in mission that we shall begin to understand the kind of unity that God wants for His church, since unity is an eschatological concept. Only in the pursuit of mission are we going to be led into the meaning of unity," he said. "The promise of unity which is given in mission stimulates the churches to the task of co-operative ventures in mission and to manifest that unity which they already have in Christ, for mission achieves its full strength in mission

John Mackay, the chairman of the International Missionary Council, in his address to the Assembly also raised these concerns expressed by Max Warren.<sup>41</sup> According to Mackay, men and women of Christian vision and zeal have often found it difficult to fulfil their ideals of mission under the official sponsorship of the ecclesiastical organization to which they belonged.

Some of the most famous of missionary societies in the Protestant tradition, and some that have been most loyal to the International Missionary Council, and at the same time most creative in facing human needs on the great frontiers of the Kingdom, have been, and continue to be, independent of the Churches to which their members belong. The reasons for such a development are complex, . . . In some instances, the organizations have quite unfortunately lacked a sense of the Church; in others they have lacked a confidence in the dedication of the Church to mission. There has also been a fear that ecclesiastical control might stifle Christian initiative. On the other hand, there are examples of organized denominations in which the church is literally the mission. In many parts of the world today every member of the several churches that make up the Pentecostal World Fellowship are not only committed Christians, but ardent missionaries.... In the Roman Catholic Communion, the many religious orders which carry on missionary activity in different parts of the world do so with full autonomy, and do not function under the direction or direct control of the Vatican or the Roman Catholic authorities in any given country.<sup>42</sup>

Referring to mission and unity, Mackay said that the church had a unitive mission to fulfil. It should seek and express unity which would help the fulfillment of its mission in the world. The true pattern of the church's unity is the oneness which exists between the Father and the Son, the unity that marks the life of the Holy Trinity. The unity that exists in the Godhead is a missionary unity. Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit are together dedicated to a missionary task and the unity of the church becomes effective in the measure in which the world believes that the Father sent the Son to be its Savior. For Mackay, as for Max Warren it was on the road of missionary obedience that the unity of the church of Christ could be achieved and prove most effective. He said:

It is on this road, and only on this road, that a pilgrim, missionary Church, which subordinates everything in its heritage to the fulfillment of its mission, will discover the structural form and appropriate organ which will best express its oneness in Christ and contribute most of its missionary service for Christ. On the road of the Church's missionary obedience, the Holy Spirit will reveal the form of ecumenical organization which is most in harmony with the reality of the Church as a world community which seeks to be loyal to its mission and unity.<sup>43</sup>

The World Council of Churches, at different times, had tried to answer some of the criticisms raised against it, especially the criticism that it was on the way to become a super church. The statement of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches in Toronto in 1950, under the title, 'The Church, the Churches and the World Council of Churches', tried to clarify the nature of the World Council <sup>44</sup>. Writing in the *Ecumenical Review* on 'The Super Church and the Ecumenical Movement', Visser't Hooft, the General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, denied that the World Council of Churches was a super church or that it was on the way towards creating a centralized, authoritarian, monopolistic and politically minded ecclesiastical system. His contention was that the ecumenical movement attempted to foster unity by purely spiritual means and with full recognition of the autonomy and specific characteristic of member churches.<sup>45</sup>

At the Ghana Assembly, the opposition to the integration of the two Councils came not only from the evangelicals, but also from the Eastern Orthodox churches. For the Orthodox churches the oneness of the church was an absolute pre-requisite for the proper discharge of mission. For them, unity constituted the principal characteristic of the church of Christ, while mission was the outward expression of the task that Christ Himself delegated to it.<sup>46</sup> The Metropolitan James of Melita, (the representative of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in the World Council of Churches), told the Assembly that the Orthodox church gives preponderance to unity, for it believes that unity in faith, aim and scope should form the substance for any missionary activity. The Orthodox believe that only a united church, sanctified through truth, can effectively proclaim Christ and bring nations to Him. He said:

The Orthodox Church will therefore continue to believe that unity belongs to mission but it will also continue to

question the opinion of some that mission can eventually lead to unity. Missions can probably lead to mergers or limited schemes of unity, but it would be more than audacious to think that they can lead to unity.<sup>47</sup>

A second objection of the Orthodox to the integration of the two Councils was the fear of the proselytizing of some of the Protestant missions. The Metropolitan James of Melita in his statement said:

To summarize what I have so far said: the question of integration is envisaged by the Ecumenical Patriarchate as a rather technical or organizational question, and as such it is given all necessary attention. I like in any case to stress and repeat that the Ecumenical Patriarchate is guided in the discussions and study of the subject by its concern for the World Council of Churches. It would never vote for any radical amendment of the World Council of Churches Constitution nor would it be prepared to accept any change in the World Council of Churches ecclesiology as declared in the well-known Toronto Statement. Finally, the Ecumenical Patriarchate will insist on the two principles, (a) that the sole aim of mission' should be to reach peoples yet unconverted to Christ and never to proselytize among the members of other Christian Churches, and (b) that missions should be 'Church missions' and should work for the upbuilding of the Church.<sup>48</sup>

Thus, both the evangelical Protestants and the Orthodox churches viewed with apprehension the integration of the International Missionary Council and World Council of Churches, though for different reasons. For the evangelicals, unity did not guarantee mission and was not a pre-requisite for mission. The concern for unity very often distracted the attention of the church away from its primary task of evangelism. They saw church history as a tide of missionary expansion whose advance was often checked by the organized church. For them it was only in mission that the nature of Christian unity could be discovered. For the Orthodox, mission did not guarantee unity and unity was a pre-condition for mission. They often complained that there was a failure on the part of the ecumenical movement to recognize that unity was an integral part of the Gospel itself. For the Orthodox, mission was church's mission and should work for the building up of the church. The

church was first of all, and before everything else, a God-created and God-given reality, the Presence of Christ's life, the manifestation of the age of the Holy Spirit. The church was the manifestation of the fullness of Christ and the church shared this fullness of Christ with the world in mission. Mission was the fruit of the total being of the church and not a specialty for those who received a particular missionary calling. Not surprisingly, both groups found enough evidence in church history to support their case.

The ecumenical discussion on mission and unity was very inconclusive. Many questions remained unanswered. The most important question raised by the Joint Committee as to the exact relationship between mission and unity did not receive proper consideration. What was said at the time of the integration of the two Councils in the New Delhi Assembly in 1961 was that they exist together as the two sides of the same reality.<sup>49</sup> With the integration, the ecumenical discussion on the subject lost much of its momentum.

The question of the relationship between unity and mission was a serious issue even in the New Testament itself. This was evident in the Jerusalem Council recorded in the Acts of the Apostles (ch.15). The effort of the Council was to maintain Christian unity in the face of pressures for missionary expansion. Keith R. Bridston, a former secretary of the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches points out that the apostolic missionary outreach not only strained the territorial lines of unity identified with the original Jerusalem fellowship, but the success of the apostolic preaching among non-Jewish people meant that the unity of the church based on the ethnic homogeneity of the primitive fellowship of the Jewish disciples, had to be radically questioned and re-examined. The achievement of the Jerusalem Council, according to Bridston, was that through it the church moved beyond a static conception of unity.<sup>50</sup> The Jerusalem Council also showed the struggle of the early church to understand mission in such a way that unity was maintained. Commenting on the Jerusalem Council, John Knox, a New Testament scholar, observes that Paul was fighting not only for the freedom of the Gentiles from the Law but also for the unity of the church. He said that Paul's statement that he went to consult the Jerusalem leaders, "lest somehow [he] should be running or had run in vain", (Galatians 2.2) meant more than that he feared his opponents might seriously interfere with his work unless they were checked. "What can be expressed here if not Paul's deep concern that the Church shall be one"<sup>51</sup> For Paul, his work would have been in vain

if it had to be considered as a special or separatist Gospel. For him, as for the Orthodox church later, the oneness of the church belonged to the content of the Gospel and to contradict that oneness by separate existence would be to deny the Gospel itself.

As to the relationship between unity and mission, Bridston suggests that they exist in polar tension. The tension between unity and mission has been evident in every period and in all types of Christian communities. The existence of this unresolved tension, according to Bridston, is the clue to the creativity and liveliness of the church through the ages. When the tension is relaxed, vitality diminishes. Unity realized at the expense of mission results in fragmentary dissolution. To exist in dialectical tension means that unity is understood in such a way that it becomes dynamic for expansion, and mission is defined in such a way that it realizes and maintains unity.<sup>52</sup> The failure to maintain the dual demand in polar tension is the distortion or denial in some sense of both and a negation of the purpose of the ecumenical movement. The question for the integrated World Council of Churches is whether this purpose has been realized in the ecumenical movement or not.

The questions of unity and mission were not problems for the early church as long as early Christians were confined to Jerusalem and to the Jews. But as soon as the church crossed the Palestinian Jewish border and entered into the wider world of Greco-Roman religions, races and cultures, the questions of the church's catholicity and the universality of its message became serious issues for the church. The early church understood the catholicity of its nature and the universality of its message only when it was engaged in mission among the Gentiles in the world of pagan religions and cultures. It understood the nature of its catholicity in demarcation from the ethnic homogeneity of Palestinian Judaism, and it understood the meaning of the universality of its message in confrontation with other religions, philosophies and cultures. Both Max Warren and John Mackay were right when they said at the International Missionary Council Assembly of Ghana that only in mission will we understand the nature of the unity we need and discover the structural form and appropriate organ which will best express the church's oneness in Christ.

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# **Edinburgh to Salvador: Twentieth Century Ecumenical Missiology by T.V. Philip**

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## **Chapter 4: World, Mission, and Church**

If the period between 1910 and 1960 saw mission discovering the church, the next twenty years saw the church discovering the world as the locus of its life and mission. The chief characteristics of the theological developments of the sixties was a series of attempts to take the secular world seriously. About this Roger Hazelton wrote:

... the present theological movement may be seen in terms of an exciting consensus which appears to be forming on the nature of the church vis-à-vis the world. 'The church against the world' emphasis of twenty or thirty years back is now being radically questioned and superseded by a far more positive appreciation of the secular and the cultural, and on explicitly Christian grounds.<sup>1</sup>

This changed conception of the world had its counterpart in a changed understanding of the church and its mission. Theologians began to ask if there was something profoundly secular, and by no means simply 'religious', about the Gospel itself. Dietrich Bonhoeffer once described his theological task as "giving a non-religious interpretation to Biblical ideas". Since 1960, a radical shift in ecclesiological thinking has taken place. The church as an institution promoting 'religion' and 'human

religiousness' had come under criticism. The new emphasis on the world challenged the hitherto church-centric view of mission that had been developing in the International Missionary Council and the ecumenical movement in general. According to Johannes Aagaard, a Danish missiologist, "Churchism in missiology disappeared in the sixties like dew before the sun".<sup>2</sup> For such a development, the influence of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and S.C. Hoekendijk in Europe, and of M.M. Thomas and some others in Asia, was decisive.

Bonhoeffer (1906-1945) executed by the Nazis in 1945 for his resistance to Hitler, was a gifted Protestant theologian. His letters and papers from prison had a great influence on theological thinking in the western world. He spoke of the world as having come of age. "The world that has come of age is more godless, and perhaps for that very reason nearer to God than the world before its coming of age". For Bonhoeffer, to live in Christ meant to be a church which existed, not for the pious faithful, but for others. M.M. Thomas (1916-1996) was the most well known Indian Christian thinker in this century. He was the moderator of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches from 1968-1975. In his writings and speeches, he stressed the importance of the secular for the wholeness of the church's life and mission. According to him, the church is not a sphere of existence distinct and separate from the natural world and history. The church is none other than the secular, which knows its true reality in the new age inaugurated by Christ. The church is the world, which knows itself to be in Christ, under the judgement and the grace of the crucified and risen Christ. In contrast to those who would build the community of faith as a heaven in the midst of secular society, Thomas spoke of the church consisting primarily of lay persons doing their secular jobs and witnessing to the true life of the secular. He spoke of the lay vocation as the basis for the vocation of the ordained ministry, and the theologian as the articulator of the theological insights of lay people as they seek to relate themselves as believers to the lay world.<sup>3</sup>

Reflecting on the meaning of the revolutionary events that were taking place in Asia after the Second World War, Thomas and his colleagues in Asia, brought into the ecumenical thinking their conviction that God, somehow, is at work in the secular events of our time beyond the boundaries of the church. In his address to the New Delhi Assembly of the WCC in 1961, Thomas spoke of Christ being present in the world of today engaged in a continuous dialogue with the peoples and nations. "It is a foolish and mad idea", he said, "to think that Christ works only

through the Church or Christian people. In fact the Church and the world have the same center, Jesus Christ, it is therefore impossible to confine the work of Christ in or through the Church".

Johannes C. Hoekendijk (1912-1975) from Holland was a missionary in Indonesia and later a mission board secretary and theological professor. He was Secretary for Evangelism of the WCC from 1949-52. While with the World Council of Churches, he was closely involved in theological discussions in the ecumenical movement and contributed much to its thinking. Hoekendijk was a vehement critic of the church centric view of mission. In his thinking, the world and the Kingdom of God (Gospel) are correlated. The Kingdom of God is destined for the world. The world is the field in which the seeds of the Kingdom are sown - the scene of the proclamation of the Kingdom. The *kerygma* of the early Christians did not know of a redemptive act of God which was not directed to the whole world. In the New Testament, the world as a unity is confronted with the Kingdom.<sup>4</sup> In his scheme, it is God-World-Church and not God-Church-World. He wrote:

As soon as we speak of God, we are also bringing into speech the world as God's theatre stage for his action, and it is foremost the Church who knows it and who will respect it. As soon as the Church acknowledges God, she also admits her own implicitly eccentric position, hoping that at some point in time it may come true that she can serve as an instrument to honor the world's worth and destiny. The eccentric Church cannot insist on protecting its own structures. She does not possess a private sociology; rather she uses - purely functionally - all available worldly structures in so far as they are useable.<sup>5</sup>

Hoekendijk advocated that, instead of thinking of apostolate as a function of the church, we should think of the church as a function of the apostolate.

The missionary movement was very slow in recognizing the importance of the secular world in its thinking. By Willingen (1952) there were signs of a change. The Willingen Conference in its report on 'The Missionary Calling of the Church' called the churches to be in solidarity with the world. It said that the church's words and works, its whole life of mission, are to be a witness to what God has done, is doing, and will do in Christ.

But this word 'witness' cannot possibly mean that the Church stands over against the world, detached from it and regarding it from a position of superior righteousness or security. The Church is in the world, as the Lord of the Church identified Himself wholly with mankind, so must the Church also do. The nearer the Church draws to its Lord the nearer it draws to the world. Christians do not live in an enclave separated from the world, they are God's people in the world.<sup>6</sup>

The Conference went on to say:

There the Church is required to identify itself with the world, not only in its perplexity and distress, its guilt and its sorrow, but also in its real acts of love and justice - acts by which it often puts the Churches to shame. The Church must confess that they have often passed on by the other side while the unbeliever, moved by compassion, did what the Churches ought to have done. Whenever the Church denies its solidarity with the world, or divorces its deeds from its word, it destroys the possibility of communicating the Gospel and presents to the world an offence which is not the genuine offence of the cross.<sup>7</sup>

Willingen stressed the need to discern the signs of the times, the need to see the hand of God in the great events of our day, "in the vast enlargement of human knowledge and the power which this age is witnessing, in the mighty political and social movements of our time, and in the countless personal experiences of which the inner history cannot be revealed until the last day"<sup>8</sup>

The 1960s was a decade of upheaval. It was marked by revolts of young people against accepted values and traditions. There were protests against the Vietnam War. The Civil Rights Movement led by Martin Luther King along with the anti-Vietnam War demonstrations created social upheaval in America. The struggle of the Blacks in South Africa against apartheid took a serious turn during the decade. In China it was a period of cultural revolution. It was also a period of cold war between the USA and USSR. The dissatisfaction of the students with the WSCF Conference on the World Mission of the Church in Strasburg in 1960 was an indication of the mood among young Christian people. "In the

Christian Student World, the WSCF meeting in Strasburg of 1960 has been interpreted as a sign of the times: hence according to recent interpreters, the voice of Karl Barth, Visser't Hooft, Leslie Newbigin and D.T. Niles ... were unable to hold their hearers with neo-orthodox presentations; rather, the missiologically radical views of J.C.(Hans) Hoekendijk, showing a certain impatience with the Church and its institutional forms, while pointing to the *missio Dei*, God's activity in the world and its structures independently of the Church, caught the student mood".<sup>9</sup>

This emphasis on the secular world became the central thrust of the World Council of Churches study on 'The Missionary Structure of the Congregations'. The report of the study published in 1967 under the title, 'Church for Others', points out:

The Church exists for the world. It is called to the service of mankind. this is not an election to privilege but to serving engagement. The Church lives in order that the world may know its true being. It is *pars pro toto*, it is the first fruits of the new creation. But its center lies outside itself; it must live ex-centrally. It must seek out those institutions in the world that call for living responsibly and there it must announce and point to *shalom*, this ex-centric position of the Church implies that we must stop thinking front the inside towards the outside. <sup>10</sup>

The report also made it clear that the church's nature and function need to be re-thought in relation to God's concern for the world, when it said:

The Church is part of the world where God's concern is recognized and celebrated. The Church must be understood in its world-relation as an expression of God's will that all men be saved (1 Tim. 2:3). This affirms its existence for all men (pro-existence). In terms of God's concern for the world, the Church is a segment of the World, a postscript, that is, added to the world for the purpose of pointing to and celebrating both Christ's presence and God's ultimate redemption of the whole world. <sup>11</sup>

This re-discovery of the world in the missionary movement had repercussions in the ecumenical movement as a whole. Colin W.

Williams speaks of a radical shift in focus in the ecumenical movement.<sup>12</sup> He pointed out that in the period between Amsterdam (1948) and Evanston (1954) Assemblies of the World Council of Churches, there was, in the ecumenical movement, a search for a common ecclesiology in terms of the continuities that were behind the divisions. In the period between the Evanston and New Delhi (1961) Assemblies, it was felt that the search for a common tradition behind the various traditions was rather inward looking, and hence, one must not only look for visible continuities (such as Word and Sacrament) but also for the event of obedience to the mission of Christ. Unity is given not just in historical continuities; it is a gift that is received only as the call to mission is obeyed. It was hoped that by adding mission to the marks of the church, the true position of ecclesiology could be restored. During the period between the New Delhi and Uppsala (1968) Assemblies, a shift began to appear in a more radical form. In this period it was realized that it is not enough to attempt to solve the problems of ecclesiology by adding 'mission' to the classical mark of the church. What is required is to move ecclesiology out of the center of theological concern, for as soon as ecclesiology becomes central, it is falsified. The way to a true ecclesiology must be indirect, for the church is meant to be not an end in itself but the servant of God's mission to the world.<sup>13</sup>

By the end of the 1960s, there emerged in the ecumenical movement a general consensus that the ecclesiological issues could only be resolved by first going beyond the church and asking the question about God's mission to the world. Theologians spoke of the church in functional terms, as a project - a way of obedience that must be continually fashioned within the particular situation in history in the light of the ultimate purpose of God for history. They pointed out that the role of the church was not to draw the world into the order of the church. We must cease thinking of the ultimate salvation of the world as a process by which Christ's Lordship over the Body is expanded until at last it draws the whole world into its realm. The church is the servant of Christ's struggle to bring new life to the communities of the world, to His creation as a whole. The struggle to reveal Christ's Lordship over His creation must be related to the actual struggles of the people in the social and political structures of our time. The church can be the church only as it is the community of obedience to Christ within the structures of life where human existence is already played out. "The House of God is not the Church but the world, wherein the Church dwells and labors as its servant".<sup>14</sup>

Colin Williams asks the question, "where are we to look for the Church?".<sup>15</sup> He says that the Church is an event; it is where the people of God are taking servant shape around the needs and hopes of the world - as servants of Christ and therefore servants of humanity. This means the church is called to move into the world as Christ still moves in the world. Christ did not come as one dispensing pre-established answers, the bringer of a changeless eternal order into our changing temporal order. He came as a full participant in history. He came as the one whose freedom was His complete freedom for the needs of the world, moving out from behind the barricades of assumed safety and order to reach for the excluded with the community-creating power of servant love. Beyond its apparent defeat, he revealed the power of this love to create in his disciples the faith and courage to become participants in the servant way. And those participants are the church - the followers of the way. <sup>16</sup>

Colin William points Out that the direction of ecclesiology in the sixties was a movement away from yesterday's question of where the true church is to be found within the established order of Christendom, to today's question of where the living church must occur as witness to Christ's presence in the secular world. This new direction was very much seen in the deliberations of the Church and Society Conference in Geneva in 1966 and the Uppsala Assembly of the World Council of Churches in 1968.

### **Geneva Conference 1966**

In his opening address to the World Conference on Church and Society, Visser't Hooft, General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, said, "We do not speak because we want to have a say in the affairs of the world, but because we cannot live with God, with other fellowmen, with ourselves, if we keep silent". The main theme of the Conference was, 'Christians in Technical and Social Revolutions of Our Time', and its purpose was to look at the problems of the modern world in technological revolutions as it affects the economic, political and cultural life of the peoples, communities and states and to consider the challenge and relevance of theology to the social revolutions of our time. M.M. Thomas, the moderator of the Conference observed, "it is one thing to be a community of faith in isolation from the tensions of social and international life. It is another for a community of faith to become also a community of social thought at a revolutionary time." <sup>17</sup>

The whole emphasis of the Conference was on 'newness' both for the Church and the World. Prof. Dumas said, "God is God because he incessantly creates anew whereas man holds fast to what is old in both his comfort and distress.... The new does not strike fear in God, as if he were the jealous keeper of the source of life or the implacable trustee of eternal truth.... He does not preserve and maintain; he breaks through..." Dumas explained that God wills creation to be continually renewed. Jesus Christ embodies the highest movement of God's renewal. He still comes in the midst of time to renew human beings and their communities, which are the objects of his love.<sup>18</sup> Similarly, Bola Ige of Nigeria, after saying that there are people who want change to remain within the constitutional limits, said, "We do not need the past; we have got to throw it away - including, if necessary, those who held political power in the past". He argued for global revolutionary change which would knock at all existing suffocating constitutions, systems and powers that keep them going.<sup>19</sup> The Conference was critical of the negative attitude of the churches to revolutionary changes and called the churches to develop an ethos of revolutionary humanism. It was said that the task of the church was not to set up any Christian orders, systems, or societies, but to humanize the secular orders. The Conference message to the churches reads:

As Christians we are committed to working for the transformation of society. In the past, we have usually done this through quiet efforts at social renewal, working in and through established institutions according to their rules. Today, a significant number of those who are dedicated to the service of Christ and their neighbor assume a more radical or revolutionary position. They do not deny the value of tradition or social order, but they are searching for a new strategy by which to bring about basic changes in society without too much delay. In many parts of the world today, the Church represents a relatively small minority, participating in the struggle for the future of man alongside of other religious and secular movements. Moreover, it can hope to contribute to the transformation of the world only as it is itself transformed in contact with the world.<sup>20</sup>

The Geneva Conference influenced the thinking of the Uppsala Assembly of the World Council of Churches. According to the Geneva Conference, Christian witness in a revolutionary world means effective

and vigorous action for the transformation of the world. Mission as humanization was the dominant note in Uppsala.

## **Uppsala 1968**

The fourth Assembly of the World Council of Churches met in Uppsala, Sweden in 1968. The main theme of the Assembly was, 'Behold I Make All Things New'. In its message to the churches, the Assembly said that 'man' was lost because he did not know who he was. But in Christ a 'new man' appears and God can transform us in to Christ's new humanity.

In the discussions in the Assembly, the nature of the church and its mission were very clearly linked. Introducing the section report on: The Holy Spirit and the Catholicity of the Church, Bishop Karekin Sarkissian made this clear. He pointed out that catholicity was not a mark of the church but rather, a vocation to be accomplished. He said:

The Church's catholicity, therefore, is closely linked with her apostolicity. Any conception of catholicity is void of validity and value if it does not take seriously what Christ said to His disciples ... "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age".

The catholicity of the Church is taken up and carried into her apostolicity, her mission. Without such a dynamic understanding, the term becomes almost an empty word, or, in the best instance, a holy relic to be preserved and cherished in the most treasured data of the Christian creed.<sup>21</sup>

Sarkissian emphasized that , "the catholic understanding of apostolicity, or, to put it in another way: the apostolic understanding of catholicity makes both these qualities inter-related, inseparable, complementary forms of existence and ways of witness".<sup>22</sup>

In the final report of the section it reads:

Since Christ lived, died and rose again for all mankind, catholicity is the opposite of all kinds of egoism and particularism. It is the quality by which the Church expresses the fullness, the integrity and the totality of life in Christ. The Church is Catholic, and should be catholic in all her elements and in all aspects of her life, especially in her worship. Members of the Church should reflect the integrity and wholeness which is the essential character of the Church. One measure of her internal unity is that it is said of believers that they have but one heart and one soul (Acts 4:32. Phil. 2:1-12). There are two factors in it the unifying grace of the Spirit and the humble efforts of believers, who do not seek their own, but are united in faith, in adoration, and in love and service of Christ for the sake of the world. Catholicity is a gift of the Spirit, but it is also a task, a call and an engagement. <sup>23</sup>

In its report on Renewal in Mission. the Assembly stressed that 'Jesus Christ the new Man' is the answer to human longing for renewal. The report said:

We belong to a humanity that cries passionately and articulately for a fully human life. Yet the very humanity of man and of his societies is threatened by a greater variety of destructive forces than ever. And the acutest moral problems all hinge upon the question: What is man? We Christians know that we are in this worldwide struggle for meaning, dignity, freedom and love, and we cannot stand aloof. We have been charged with a message and ministry that have to do with more than material needs, but we can never be content to treat our concern for physical and social needs as merely secondary to our responsibility for the needs of the spirit. There is a burning relevance today in describing the mission of God, in which we participate, as the gift of a new creation which is a radical renewal of the old and the invitation to men to grow up into their full humanity in the new man, Jesus Christ.<sup>24</sup>

Men and women can see their true nature only if they see themselves in Christ. It is in Jesus Christ we see what man is meant to be. The report said:

Jesus Christ, incarnate, crucified and risen, is the new man. In him was revealed the image of God as he glorified his Father in a perfect obedience. In his total availability for others, his absolute involvement and absolute freedom, his penetrating truth and his triumphant acceptance of suffering and death, we see what man is meant to be. Through that death on the cross, man's alienation is overcome by the forgiveness of God and the way is opened for the restoration of all men to their sonship. In the resurrection of Jesus a new creation was born, and the final goal of history was assured, when Christ as head of that new humanity will sum up all things.<sup>25</sup>

The new manhood is a gift and is to be appropriated by faith. "Our part in evangelism might be described as bringing about the occasions for men's response to Jesus Christ". Mission bears fruit as people find their true life in the Body of Christ.

The report also speaks of dialogue with people of other faiths. In dialogue we share our common humanity, its dignity and fallen-ness, and express our common concern for that humanity. It opens the possibility of sharing in new forms of community and common service. Each meets and challenges the other; witnessing from the depth of his existence to the ultimate concerns that come to expressions in word and deed. As Christians we believe that Christ speaks in this dialogue, revealing himself to those who do not know him and correcting the limited and distorted knowledge of those who do. Dialogue and proclamation are not the same. The one complements the other in a total witness. It implies neither a denial of uniqueness of Christ or any loss of his own commitment to Christ.<sup>26</sup>

Speaking of the Uppsala Report. M.M. Thomas points out that Uppsala seems to describe the mission of salvation as the invitation to men and women to put on the New Humanity offered to all by God in the 'New Man' Jesus Christ, incarnate, crucified and risen.

Thus Jesus Christ and the New Humanity offered in this are presented as the spiritual foundation, the source of judgement, renewal and ultimate fulfillment of the struggles of mankind today for its humanity. And the

implication of this theological approach would be that the Mission of the Church must be fulfilled in integral relation to, even within the setting of a dialogue with, the revolutionary ferment in contemporary religious and secular movements which express men's search for the spiritual foundations for a fuller and richer human life. It is within the context of such a dialogue that proclamation of Christ becomes meaningful.<sup>27</sup>

The Assembly declared that mobilizing the people of God for mission today necessitated a continuing re-examination of the structures of Christian life at all levels. The question is not: Have we the right structures for mission? But are we totally structured for mission?

The Assembly also proposed the following criteria for evaluating priorities for mission.: Do they place the Church alongside the poor, the defenseless, the abused, the forgotten and the bound?; Do they allow the Christians to enter into the concerns of others, to accept their issues as vehicles of involvement? Are they the best structures for discerning with others the signs of the times and for moving with history towards the coming of the new humanity?<sup>28</sup>

The new developments in the ecumenical thinking on mission in the 1960s have raised other serious issues for the missionary movement. If the Christian church is the community serving the secular world, then the question has been asked : What is the form and the content of salvation which Christ offers in the secular world? As Leslie Newbigin pointed out, the problems posed for missions by the rise of the younger churches, the end of colonialism, and the development of inter-church aid on a massive scale were questions about the forms and patterns of missionary action. The Mexico Conference of 1963, when it spoke of missions to six continents, raised questions concerning the form and structure of missions. The shift from the 'three continents' to 'six continents' perspective was a matter of structure. But the questions that face the ecumenical movement now are different ones. They are questions about the substance of the Gospel itself. Newbigin wrote:

The questions that have now to be answered concern the content of that proclamation itself. What is the relation of this proclamation to the action of. God in the secular world, to the service rendered by Christians to their fellowmen. and to the life of the Church? There is a crisis

of faith in the Church, and upon its outcome will depend the possibility of faithful proclamation. During the years in which drastic changes of structure were being made, those involved largely took the content of the gospel for granted. Today that can no longer be done. The course of the next stage in the worldwide mission of the Church will depend upon the recovery by the Church of clarity regarding the gospel which it has to proclaim.<sup>29</sup>

In 1968, the World Council of Church's Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME) initiated a three-year study project on 'Salvation Today'. It culminated in the World Mission Conference in Bangkok, Thailand in December 1972. The theme of the Conference was : Salvation Today. Philip Potter, the then Director of the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism of the World Council of Churches (who in 1972 became its General Secretary), wrote in the International Review of Missions explaining the reason why that particular theme had been chosen. Even though the word 'salvation' and the allied words smack of aggressive posture and were not popular in Christian circles, he pointed out that "... to proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and savior so that the world may believe and be saved is the aim of the CWME. The concept of salvation impinges on many issues which are discussed in the ecumenical movement, for example, the dialogue with the people of other faiths and with humanists and Marxists. Moreover, there is no agreement with regard to the meaning of salvation within the Christian church itself".<sup>30</sup>

### **Bangkok 1972 : Salvation Today**

The Conference was organized by the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism of the World Council of Churches and was attended by three hundred and thirty participants from sixty-nine countries. Speaking on the main theme, MM. Thomas pointed out that human spirituality undergirds all human strivings for health and sex, for development and justice. He spoke of the meaning of salvation today as human spirituality committed to structures of ultimate meaning and sacredness - not in any pietistic or individualistic isolation, but related to and expressed within the material, social and cultural revolution of our time. Human spirituality can be either true or false - either related to the ultimate meaning and fulfillment of life revealed in Christ or simply created by people in their self-centeredness and rejection of God, and therefore idolatrous. All secular strivings for fuller human life should be

placed and interpreted in their relation to the ultimate meaning and fulfillment of human life revealed in the divine humanity of the crucified and risen Christ. The primary concern of Christian mission is with the salvation of human spirituality, with the human being's right choice of structures of ultimate meaning and sacredness.<sup>31</sup>

The Bangkok conference affirmed two important characteristics of salvation. In the first place it affirmed the comprehensive nature of salvation. Secondly, it affirmed that when salvation is expressed in concrete terms, in relation to realities daily expressed, it presents a variety of faces. About these two characteristics, Emilio Castro, a Latin American theologian, who became the Director of the Division of World Mission and Evangelism (DWME) after the Bangkok meeting and later the General Secretary of the World Council of Churches wrote:

We found that the concern for the growth of the Church is related to the concern for social justice and cultural authenticity; that Christian participation in struggles for social justice, especially in actions favoring the powerless of the world is not a deviation from the main concern of the Christian faith but precisely the relevant manifestation of it in today's world. We discovered that in situations like Vietnam, the priority for salvation was peace and that the only way for Christians to act credibly was to fight for peace. In other situations we discovered that salvation was present in the search for independence, or for reconciliation. In no case did this or that particular priority exhaust the possibilities or the content of the Christian message of salvation, but without that priority the Gospel would be destroyed.<sup>32</sup>

In its affirmation on salvation today, the Conference said:

With gratitude and joy we affirm again our confidence in the suffering of our crucified and risen Lord. ... To the individual he comes with power to liberate him from every evil and sin, from every power in heaven and earth, from every threat of life or death. To the world he comes as the Lord of the universe, with deep compassion for the poor and the hungry, to liberate the powerless and the, oppressed. To the powerful and the oppressors he comes in judgement and mercy.<sup>33</sup>

According to the Conference, salvation expresses God's concern and love for all humanity. Therefore nothing human is foreign to the Christian community and the task of Christian mission. Within this comprehensive notion of salvation, the Conference saw the saving work of Christ in four social dimensions. Salvation works in the struggle for economic justice against the exploitation of people by people; in the struggle for human dignity against the political oppression of human beings; in the struggle for solidarity against the alienation of person from person; and in the struggle of hope against despair in personal life. In the process of salvation we must relate the four dimensions to each other. There is no economic justice without political freedom, no political freedom without economic justice. There is no justice, no human dignity, no solidarity without hope, no hope without justice, dignity and solidarity. But there are historical priorities according to which salvation is anticipated in one dimension first, be it in the personal, the political or the economic. The point of entry may differ from situation to situation. But we need to realize that such anticipations are not the whole of salvation, and must keep in mind the other dimensions. Forgetting this will deny the wholeness of salvation.<sup>34</sup>

The main theme was divided into three sections for Conference discussion: Salvation and Social Justice; Salvation and Cultural Identity; and Renewal of the Churches in Relation to Salvation.

The section on Salvation and Social Justice points out that as evil works both in personal life and in exploitative social structures which humiliate humankind, so God's justice manifests itself both in the justification of the sinner and in social and political justice. The struggles for economic justice, political freedom and cultural renewal are elements in the total liberation of the world through the mission of Christ. After pointing out that the problem of personal identity. is closely related to the problem of cultural identity, the section on Cultural Identity said, "Culture shapes the human voice that answers the voice of Christ". Many Christians who have received the Gospel through western agents ask the question : Is it really I who have answered Christ ? Is it not another person instead of me ? The problem is, how can we ourselves be fully responsible when receiving the salvation of Christ. How can we. responsibly answer the voice of Christ instead of copying foreign models of conversion - imposed, not truly accepted ? We refuse to be merely raw materials to be used by other people to achieve their own salvation. The universality of the Christian

message does not contradict its particularity. Christ has to be responded to in particular situations. Many people try to give universal validity to their own particular responses instead of acknowledging that the diversity of responses to Christ is essential because they are related to particular situations and are thus relevant and complementary.<sup>35</sup>

The third section on Renewal in Mission puts great emphasis on local mission of the local church. It also raised the relationship between the western missions and the churches in the third world. In this context, Bangkok raised the question of moratorium on mission and said that such a moratorium would enable the receiving church to find its own identity, to set its own priorities and discover within its own fellowship the resources to carry out its own authentic mission.

Without salvation of Churches in their captivity in the interests of the dominating classes, races, and nations, there can be no saving Church. Without the liberation of Churches and Christians from their complicity with structural injustice and violence, there can be no liberating Church for mankind. All Churches, all Christians face the question whether they serve Christ and His saving work alone or at the same time as also the powers of inhumanity. "No man can serve two masters, God and mammon" (Matt. 6. 24). We must confess our misuse of the name of Christ by the accommodation of the Churches to the oppressive powers, by our own self-interested apathy, lovelessness and fear. We are seeking the true community of Christ which works and suffers for his kingdom. We seek the charismatic Church which activates energy for salvation (I. Cor. 12). We seek the Church which initiates actions for liberation and support the work of other liberating groups without calculating self-interest. We seek a Church which is the catalyst of God's saving work in the world, a Church which is not merely the refuge of the saved but a community serving the world in the love of Christ.<sup>36</sup>

The statement of Bangkok that we seek a church which is not merely the refuge of the saved but a church which is the catalyst of God's savings work in the world, summarizes, in a sense, the ecumenical thinking on church and mission during the two decades after the New

Delhi assembly of the World Council of Churches. For such as development, the conferences in Geneva, Uppsala and Bangkok made significant contributions. Henceforth, the ecumenical perspective is not merely confined to inter-church relations and attitudes, the aim of which is to overcome divisions among Christians. It calls for a wider understanding of the church than is usually held in the context of its mission in the contemporary world. It calls for dialogue with other religions and spiritual traditions, and incorporates the perspective of the poor, of women and the oppressed into its own. A new understanding of catholicity of the church and the universality of the Gospel has emerged from the discussions during this period. Both catholicity and universality are not static qualities that can be expressed in institutional structures of theology. They are dynamic qualities that can be expressed or manifested only in the church's mission as it lives in constant dialogue with the world.

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# **Edinburgh to Salvador: Twentieth Century Ecumenical Missiology by T.V. Philip**

T. V. Philip, born in India and a lay member of the Mar Thoma Church, has worked and taught in India, Europe, USA and Australia. He is a church historian, and a former Professor at the United Theological College, Bangalore, India. This book was published jointly by CSS and ISPCK, 1999, Kashmere Gate, Delhi, India. This material was prepared for Religion Online by Ted and Winnie Brock.

## **Chapter 5: Ecumenical -- Evangelical Polarity**

‘Ecumenical’ and ‘Evangelical’ are not exclusive terms. Many so called "Ecumenicals" are manifestly Evangelical and many "Evangelicals" are overtly Ecumenical. These terms lack both theological precision and accuracy. Unfortunately these labels have been converted into the symbols of opposed positions and divisions. It is only for the sake of convenience and simplicity that we use these terms to refer to those whose main emphasis is on the unity of the church and the transformation of society (Ecumenical) and to those whose main emphasis is on evangelism and personal conversion (Evangelical).

The modern missionary movement from its very beginning in the nineteenth century faced controversies and tensions throughout its history. When the modern missionary movement arose there was the tension between the missionary movement and the ecclesiastical establishment that resulted in a large number of missionary societies being organized outside official church bodies. There was a separation of church and mission, both in theology and practice, in the Protestant missionary movement of the 19th century. By Madras 1938, there had developed a church-centric view of mission in the International Missionary Council, and in the ecumenical movement as a whole. But this church-centric view of mission was challenged by a number of people, including Stanley Jones. One result of the influence of the

church-centric view of missions was the integration of the International Missionary Council and the World Council of Churches in 1961. When the integration of the two Councils was discussed at the Ghana Assembly of the International Missionary Council in 1958, there was serious opposition to the integration from the Evangelicals as well as the Orthodox. The integration was proposed on the grounds that mission and unity belonged together (see Chapter 3). But for the Evangelicals, unity was not a precondition for mission. Consequently, one sad result of the integration was that several of the evangelical groups, who were associated with the International Missionary Council, and through it with the ecumenical movement as a whole, now felt alienated from the ecumenical movement as represented by the World Council of Churches. Ralph Winter saw the emergence of world evangelicalism and its Congress of 1960s and 1970s as a direct result of the Ghana Assembly of the International Missionary Council (IMC) 1958. World gatherings of the Evangelicals, such as the Berlin Congress on Evangelism in 1966, the Wheaton Congress on World Christian Mission, also in 1966, and the Lausanne International Congress on World Evangelism of 1971, were seen by Winter and others as a response to the absorption of missionary concerns into the World Council of Churches.<sup>1</sup>

From the New Delhi Assembly of the World Council of Churches in 1961, ecumenical discussions on mission moved slowly away from a church-centric to a world-centered view of mission. This view found its strong expressions in the statements of the Geneva Conference of Church and Society, the Uppsala Assembly of the World Council of Churches and the Mission Conference at Bangkok. The emphasis was not so much on what God was saying and doing in the church but on what God was saying and doing in the world. The Christian mission was thought of in terms of serving the needs of the world and making life on earth more human i.e. Mission was thought of as humanization. The Evangelicals who spoke of sin in personal rather than in structural terms, and put great stress on personal conversions and growth in holiness, were very much upset by this new emphasis within the ecumenical movement on mission as humanization. This gave rise to conflicts and controversies between the "Evangelicals" and the "Ecumenicals". Referring to Uppsala, James A. Scherer wrote:

Uppsala foreshadowed the growing rift with evangelicals, epitomized in Donald MacGavran's question, "Will Uppsala betray the two billion?". It also anticipated the

debate on mission priorities in the 1970s. For ecumenical missionary thinking, Uppsala's significance lay in the fact that it consolidated the emphasis on mission with the secular world and the focus on the world as the arena for mission, a focus that began shortly after New Delhi.<sup>2</sup>

According to Alan J. Bailyes, there were five theological issues between the ecumenical and evangelical positions : Church and world, the nature of conversion, Gospel and culture, Christology, and hermeneutics.<sup>3</sup> Bailyes explains that a sound and solid ecclesiology has long been a weak link in the evangelical chain of theology, "coming a poor second or even third behind its soteriology with its emphasis upon the individual and his/her relationship with God. The 'world' is an almost alien environment from which souls must be saved. This fundamental antipathy to the world is seen in a reticence to be involved with the structures of human society which are transient and doomed to pass away. Thus evangelism (the proclamation of the message of eternal salvation to the lost and the incorporations of converts into the church) tends to receive priority over every other activity, including, of course, seeking church unity. The latter was seen as beneficial only if co-operation led to more effective evangelism."<sup>4</sup>

In the ecumenical thinking of the 1960s, God's concern was seen as not primarily with the church, but with humanity as a whole. Consequently, mission had to aim at the 'humanization of society', the seeking of political and social liberation from all that would stand in the way of life in justice and community. If this meant political involvement, even revolutionary engagement with forces of injustice and oppression, then so be it. "In ecumenical thinking, therefore, the boundary line between church and world (and thus between salvation history and world history) was becoming progressively vague. God was to be found at work far more in the secular rather than in the religious sphere".<sup>5</sup>

Evangelicals lay great stress upon conversion and being 'born again' and this is often defined in strongly individualistic terms. In the area of Gospel and culture, in contrast to the basic understanding of the Gospel as represented by western missions, which was to all intents and purposes a non- negotiable given, the evangelicals speak of the necessity for churches in the non-western world to find indigenous expression of Christianity in ways appropriate to people's culture and traditions. In the 1970s, the ecumenical movement however, gave preference to contextual theologies. Contextual theology arises out of a dialectic

between Gospel and culture. Its focus is located in praxis within the world rather than primarily the exegesis of Scripture.

With regard to hermeneutics, Bailyes points out that the Evangelicals favored the deductive method. The first step being to determine what the Scripture says on a particular subject and then applying it to the present situation. In contrast, the ecumenical approach often argues inductively, taking the present situation as the point of departure and then reading the Scripture in the light of that situation.

### **Wheaton Congress 1966**

By 1960 there was a growing distrust of the World Council of Churches among many of the Evangelicals. This was expressed in some of the evangelical conferences held in the 1960s. In 1966, there was the Berlin Conference of the Evangelicals, organized under the leadership of Billy Graham. At this conference, the hostility to the World Council of Churches was very marked. In the same year there was the Wheaton Congress sponsored by the Evangelical Foreign Missions association and the International Foreign Mission association. Its purpose was to discuss the church's worldwide mission. The Congress was attended by some one thousand representatives from various evangelical groups. Horace L. Fenton Jr, General Director of Latin American Mission points out that there were strong differences in conviction among the evangelicals themselves and the very fact that they were able to meet, together seemed almost a miracle in itself. "It seems safe to say that five years ago such a congress could not have taken place - so strong were these differences in such matters as Pentecostalism, holiness teachings, and co-operative evangelism".<sup>6</sup> Yet they met. They were all united in one area, as Fenton writes:

But in one area, our position is unequivocal - in our commitment to the Gospel, as we understand it, and the task of world evangelization. We may occasionally err in making our charges of neo-universalism and syncretism against individuals and organizations. We ourselves may sometimes fail to present the Gospel in its biblical fullness. But we want no one to misunderstand our basic position: we are committed to a Gospel which has at its heart a demand for, and a provision of, an experience of new birth - an experience offered to all, and effective for those who receive the good news in Christ. And we

remain convinced that, whatever the social implications of the Gospel, our primary task is to take this redeeming message of personal salvation to every creature, and to use every legitimate means for the evangelization of the world in our generation. Hence there was in the congress a strong emphasis on evangelism and a readiness to explore new ways of communicating our message to our day. we were ready to face up to our obligations to express the love of Christ in a great variety of ways, but we know that at the heart of all our effort, there must be an invitation to men to be reconciled to God, and not merely an attempt to announce to them that they were already reconciled.<sup>7</sup>

Fenton made clear where the Evangelicals stood. It was their conviction that the Gospel is a message of personal salvation and offers new birth to all, and that this Gospel should be preached to every creature. This conviction, together with other major issues discussed at the Congress, made clear where the Evangelicals differed from the Ecumenicals in the 1960s. The crucial issues mentioned in the Wheaton declarations were: Mission and syncretism, mission and universal salvation, mission and proselytism, mission and the Roman Catholic Church, mission and church growth, mission and foreign mission and mission and Evangelical unity.<sup>8</sup> In all these they appealed to the Scripture as final authority. The declaration said, "In line with apostolic precedent, we appeal in many issues that confront us, to the Bible, the inspired, the only authoritative, inerrant word of God. The Scriptures constitute our final rule of faith and practice. Many of these issues were presented as if they were in opposition to the ecumenical positions. For example, with regard to Church unity the Congress said:

Today many voices call for organizational Church union at the expense of doctrine and practice (faith and order). Denominational divisions are seen as the great scandal of our day. Union becomes a major objective. However, organizational Church union of itself has seldom released a fresh missionary dynamism, or upsurge of missionary recruitment.

Christians having been regenerated by the Holy Spirit and who agree on the basic evangelical doctrines can experience a genuine biblical oneness even if they belong

to different denominations.<sup>9</sup>

For the Evangelicals, the unity of the church was directly and significantly related to the world mission of the church. In this context, the Congress called everyone to encourage and assist in the organization of evangelical fellowships among churches and missionary societies at national, regional and international levels.

Eugene L. Smith, Executive Secretary of the World Council of Churches Office in New York , was an observer at Wheaton. He wrote:

The distrust of the ecumenical movement within the group has to be experienced to be believed. Fifteen major papers were presented. ... Nine of the fifteen carried attacks on the ecumenical movement, and at times, the World Council of Churches by name. They ranged from the sadly irresponsible to one that was a careful analysis of Church growth in the United Church of Canada and the Church of South India and a conclusion that Church union does not of itself ensure evangelistic passion. There were frequent comparisons of the best in 'evangelicalism' with what seems to them the worst in 'ecumenism'... The most frequent charges against us were theological liberalism, loss of evangelical conviction, universalism in theology, substitution of social action for evangelism, and the search for unity at the expense of biblical truth. Those comparatively mild phrases by no means suggest, however, the deep intensity of conviction underlying them. <sup>10</sup>

One of the key evangelicals involved in the controversy with the World Council of Churches was Donald McGavran, the dean of the school of Missions of the Fuller Theological Seminary in USA. He was well known for his 'church- growth' theory of mission. Since the 1950s, he had advocated 'church- growth' as the object of mission. For him, the object of mission was to plant churches in every land and not to engage in social activities. "The growth and expansion of the Church is demanded by the Great Commission ... When the resources of the mission devoted to philanthropy are spent, they leave behind no organizations to continue the acts of mercy. But when they are devoted to establishing growing churches, then they create partners in the task of proclaiming the Gospel, making disciples of all people and teaching

them all things commanded by our Lord".<sup>11</sup> McGavran was critical of the social activities of missions as a preparation for the Gospel. Like Rolan Allen, he pointed out that St. Paul never engaged in activities that prepared for later discipling, but always baptized and established churches.

Just before the Uppsala Assembly of the World Council of Churches in 1968, in an article 'Will Uppsala Betray Two Billions', McGavran challenged the World Council of Churches to take seriously the salvation of two billion people in the world who had not heard of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. His criticism was in response to a draft document on Renewal in Mission that had been prepared for the Assembly. He wrote:

By Uppsala I mean, of course, the Fourth Assembly of the World Council of Churches which is to be held in Uppsala, Sweden in July 1968. By the 'two billions' I mean the great number of persons, at least two billion, who either have never heard of Jesus Christ or have no real chance to believe on Him as Lord and Savior. These inconceivable multitudes live and die in a famine of the word of God, more terrible by far than the sporadic physical famine which occur in unfortunate lands.<sup>12</sup>

He argued that if the sufferings of two billion people in Vietnam, South Africa and other places excited the imagination and compassion of the church, how much more should the spiritual sufferings of two thousand millions move her to bring multitudes of them out of darkness into God's wonderful light. The church, to be relevant, must augment her program to carry the bread of life to starving multitudes and dig wide and deep channels through which water of life may flow to the two billions perishing of thirst. The precise issue before the churches was the salvation of the two billion children of God.:

The precise issue in 1968 when the World Council of Churches will meet at Uppsala is this : how can the Christian world carry the gospel faster and better to the multitudes who want to become Christians? The chief issue is not dialogue with hostile non-Christians. In the days of his flesh, our Lord instructed his disciples to bypass indifferent and hostile villages to hurry on to the receptive. Such days have again come. This is not a time

to betray the two billions but to reconcile as many as possible of them to God in the Church of Jesus Christ. For the peace of the world, for justice between peoples and nations, for advance in learning, for breaking down hostilities between peoples, for the spiritual health of countless individuals and the corporate welfare of the humankind, this is a time to disciple the nations, baptizing them on the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and teaching them whatsoever our Lord has commanded us.<sup>13</sup>

McGavran claimed that in many lands in Asia, Africa and Latin America, an unprecedented receptivity to the Gospel existed. He said, "According to the World Christian Handbooks, the Christian population of Africa, south of the Sahara, increased from twenty million in 1950 to fifty million in 1968. It is likely to increase to a hundred million by 1990".

Eugene L. Smith took strong exception to McGavran's criticism of the Uppsala document. He pointed out that the individualistic evangelism that McGavran advocated was not adequate and that the peoples of both western and eastern countries needed to be evangelized. Smith asked, "Is there no need for true evangelism among the white Christians of South Africa who supported apartheid; among the white Christians in Latin America who maintain corrupt oligarchies; among the Christians who support the neo-Nazi movement in Germany"? Smith maintained that McGavran's position leads to a false emphasis on statistical Christianity and focused exceedingly on private morality. Instead, he advocated, "impelled both by the biblical imperative and by the nature of the human need, our task is to be used by Christ in shaping a pattern of witness as broad in vision of justice as the prophets, as deep in power as the Pentecost : development of it will require, on our part, among other things, a deep willingness on the part of those particularly concerned with justice, and those particularly concerned with evangelism, to learn from each other and move out together in joint witness to Him who is both Savior and Lord". According to Smith, the Uppsala Assembly itself pointed out that "we have been charged with a message and ministry that have to do with more than material needs, but we can never be content to treat our concern for physical and social needs as merely secondary to our responsibility for the needs of the spirit". <sup>14</sup>

It was not only McGavran who was critical of Uppsala. Echoing

McGavran, John Stott said that he failed to find, in the Uppsala report, any concern for the spiritual hunger which had been expressed in regard to physical hunger and poverty. The prior concern of the church should be in relation to millions of people who, being without Christ, are perishing. "The World Council confesses that Jesus is Lord. The Lord sends his Church to preach the Good News and make disciples. I do not see the Assembly very eager to obey its Lord's command. The Lord Jesus Christ wept over the city that had rejected him. I do not see this Assembly weeping similar tears". Buna Kibongi of the Evangelical Church of Congo, Kenneth Grubb of Church of England, and K.E. Skydsgaard of Denmark also raised similar concerns.<sup>15</sup> According to A.F. Glasser, the North American Evangelical, the evangelical voice had not been heard at Uppsala.

After noting that the Second Vatican document *Ad Gentes* also spoke of millions of people who had not heard the Gospel preached to them, Timothy Yates said that specific missionary and evangelistic dimensions, for which the International Missionary Council stood, were perceived, by Evangelical leaders, as being under threat. He says, "To read the Uppsala 1968 section report 'Renewal in Mission' along side the documents issuing from Vatican II,... is to understand why the evangelicals could have come to the view that their own emphases were more likely to be conserved and stated with a more positively biblical note on such matters as proclamation and witness by the Roman Catholic Church than by the WCC".<sup>16</sup>

McGavran who protested against the Uppsala statement also voiced his dissent on the statement on Salvation Today that was released by the Bangkok Conference . He wrote:

Does the word salvation, according to the Bible, mean eternal salvation or does this mean this worldly improvements? Which is the basic meaning? It appears as if the conciliar forces are set to maintain, on the basis of the Old Testament, that salvation means primarily, if not exclusively, this-worldly improvements. Evangelicals will maintain on the basis of total biblical record (the New Testament as well as the Old) that salvation means a change in the status of the soul, the essential person, is achieved through faith in Jesus Christ alone, and results in abundant life in this world. ... If salvation today means political liberation, land distribution, better pay for factory

workers, the downfall of the oppressive systems of government, and the like, then the whole apparatus of missions is rightly used to achieve these ends. Evangelism will be downgraded. Churching the unchurched will be neglected and ridiculed. The airplane of missions will be directed away from the propagation of the Gospel to the establishment of utopias..<sup>17</sup>

He went on to say that the Evangelicals should work and pray that this deliberate debasing of Christian currency cease and that reformation of the social order not be substituted for salvation. Salvation is something conferred by the true and the living God on His creatures in accordance with His once-for-all revelation in Jesus Christ. Salvation is a vertical relation (with God) which issues in horizontal (human) relationships. The vertical must not be replaced by the horizontal. **18**

It was the refusal of the Bangkok Conference to separate the human being into body and soul, or, to resolve the tension between the personal and social aspect of salvation that had given rise to the severe evangelical criticism of the ecumenical movement.

Like the Evangelicals, the Orthodox churches also voiced their protest against the statement on salvation at Bangkok. Patriarch Pimen of Moscow wrote to the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches pointing out the misgivings of the Russian Orthodox Church with regard to the salvation discussion at Bangkok. While agreeing that Christians should commit themselves to the struggle for social justice, he pointed out that the salvation completed by our Lord Jesus Christ, which was realized through the action of the Holy Spirit, should remain as the unshakeable foundation for the whole life and activities of the church. The Patriarch complained that in Bangkok nothing was said about the ultimate goal of salvation, namely, eternal life in God; nor did anything point to the moral improvement and perfection as an indispensable condition for the achievement of the goal. He felt that Bangkok put an exclusive emphasis on the horizontal aspect of salvation neglecting its vertical aspect. According to Patriarch Pimen, "The sociological concept of the Bangkok Conference reflects to a certain extent a trend to live without any connection with the past. But, as a famous Russian ecclesiologist said, 'the Church of the present that has no close connection with the Church of the past and future is soon to turn into the Church of the past'. **19**

In the 1960s, the Evangelicals seemed to be taking an anti-ecumenical stand. About this Baileys writes:

Evangelicalism was seen to be more and more militantly anti-ecumenical. Certainly the conference held at Wheaton (Illinois) and Berlin in 1966 reflected a crusading spirit with the WCC family in its sights. The Uppsala Assembly of the WCC (1968) confirmed the betrayal of the Gospel as far as many evangelicals were concerned (for example McGavran and Beyerhaus). It was further underlined by the CWME meeting in Bangkok in 1973.<sup>20</sup>

The late 1960s and early 70s were periods of attacks and counter attacks by the Evangelicals and Ecumenicals. It was a period of steady worsening of the relations between the two groups. David J. Bosch has described the controversies as a crisis "more radical and extensive than anything the Church has ever faced in her history"<sup>21</sup> By the early 1970s there were serious misunderstandings between the Evangelicals and the Ecumenicals.

### **Lausanne 1974**

While those controversies were going on, a significant gathering of the Evangelicals took place in 1974. The International Congress on World Evangelization was held in Lausanne (Switzerland). It was a gathering of over 2400 participants belonging to 135 Protestant denominations from 150 countries. Half the participants were from the third world. "Some hoped, while others feared that Lausanne would usher in a global organization in opposition to the WCC."<sup>22</sup> This did not happen. Instead the Evangelicals were challenged to rethink their theological position with regard to mission. Lausanne proved to be a new beginning, as far as the Evangelicals were concerned, in re-evaluating their missionary theology and their relationship to the ecumenical movement. Both in the speeches and in the statements of Lausanne, there was a note of repentance. John Stott, a leading evangelical theologian and New Testament scholar from Britain said at Lausanne:

I do not propose to put up a few ecumenical skittles in order to knock them down with well-aimed evangelical balls, so that we can all applaud our easy victory! We all know that during the last few years, especially between

Uppsala and Bangkok, ecumenical-evangelical relations hardened into something like a confrontation. I have no wish to worsen the situation... I hope in my paper to strike a note of evangelical repentance... We have some important lessons to learn from our ecumenical critics. Some of their rejection of our position is not a repudiation of biblical truth, but rather of our evangelical caricatures of it.<sup>23</sup>

Lausanne grappled seriously with the theological position of the World Council of Churches. It was the participants at Lausanne from the third world countries, especially from Latin America who helped in this process. In this they were greatly influenced by Liberation theologies. A new evangelical voice was heard from the third world participants. Samuel Escobar from Peru, warned the Evangelicals to avoid the temptation to reduce the Gospel to a spirituality without discipleship. Rene Padilla of the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students in Buenos Aires denounced the 'culture Christianity' associated with the American way of life as being as harmful to the Gospel as secular Christianity. Together with several others, they succeeded in securing in the Lausanne Covenant an affirmation that "evangelism and socio-political involvement are both part of our Christian duty. Lausanne made it clear that to discuss whether we should evangelize or promote social actions is worthless. They go together and are inseparable. We must not try to justify service for our neighbor by claiming that it will 'help us' in our evangelism".<sup>24</sup>

The Lausanne Covenant said:

We affirm that God is both the creator and the judge of all men. We therefore should share his concern for justice and reconciliation throughout human society and for the liberation of men from every kind of oppression. Because mankind is made in the image of God, every person, regardless of race, religion, color, culture, class, sex or age has an intrinsic dignity because of which he should be respected and served, not exploited. Here too we express penitence both for our neglect and for having sometimes regarded evangelism and social concern as mutually exclusive. Although reconciliation with man is not reconciliation with God, nor is social action evangelism, nor is political liberation salvation, nevertheless we affirm

that evangelism and socio-political involvement are part of our Christian duty. For both are necessary expression of our doctrines of God and man, our love for our neighbor and our obedience to Jesus Christ. The message of salvation implies also a message of judgement upon every form of alienation, oppression and discrimination, and we should not be afraid to denounce evil and injustice wherever they exist. When people receive Christ they are born again into his kingdom and must seek not only to exhibit but also to spread its righteousness in the midst of an unrighteous world. The salvation we claim should be transforming us in the totality of our personal and social responsibilities. Faith without work is dead.<sup>25</sup>

Though Lausanne still maintained the primacy of evangelism, it affirmed the socio-political involvement as an essential aspect of Christian mission. Commenting on the Lausanne Covenant, Rene Padilla claimed that the Covenant eliminated the dichotomy between evangelism and social involvement, giving socio-political concern a place of prominence that could hardly be regarded as characteristic of evangelical statements. It represented "a death blow to the superficial equation of Christian mission with the multiplication of Christians and churches".<sup>26</sup> He went on to say, "With Lausanne Covenant, Evangelicalism has taken a stand against the mutilated Gospel and the narrow view of the Church's mission that were defacing it, and has definitely claimed for itself a number of biblical features that it has tended to minimize or even destroy".<sup>27</sup>

Lausanne was a repudiation of several of the criticisms raised by McGavran against the World Council of Churches' understanding of mission; and, like the conference in Bangkok, it came to a comprehensive understanding of salvation. It was a great step in the narrowing of the gulf between the Evangelicals and the Ecumenicals., David Bosch observed:

The Lausanne Covenant is one of the most remarkable evangelical documents of recent decades and one with which a wide spectrum of Christians can identify, inter-alia because of its comprehensive and unpolemical nature. Much of what it affirms differs only slightly from WCC positions at the time.<sup>28</sup>

Lausanne was considered to be a new beginning. John Stott described the Lausanne Covenant as not so much a text for exposition as a basis for further theological construction, a spring board for fresh innovative thought".<sup>29</sup> Later evangelical conferences looked to the challenge of Lausanne and tried to work out the implications of the Covenant. The later conferences spoke of God's preferential option for the poor, divine judgement on oppressors, the pattern of Christ's own identification with the poor, the risk of suffering for Christ's sake, and Christian support for change in political studies - themes seldom associated with such passion in evangelical circles.<sup>30</sup>

At a Consultation in 1982 at Grand Rapids in the United States of America on "The Relation of Evangelism and Social Responsibility", the Consultation explained the Lausanne statement, concerning the primacy of evangelism, in two ways. First, evangelism has a certain priority; this does not necessarily imply temporal priority, but a logical priority. "The very fact of Christian social responsibility pre-supposes socially responsible Christians, and it can only be by evangelism and discipling that they have become such. If social activity is a consequence and aim of evangelism (as we have asserted), then evangelism must precede it. In addition, social progress is being hampered in some countries by the prevailing religious culture; only evangelism can change this". Second, since evangelism has to do with people's eternal destiny, then, if a choice has to be made between addressing 'physical' and 'spiritual' need, we have to say that the supreme and ultimate need of all humankind is the saving grace of Jesus Christ. A person's eternal spiritual salvation is of greater importance than his or her temporal and material well being. But the Consultation pointed out that such a choice is largely conceptual. Rather than competing with each other, they mutually support and strengthen each other.<sup>31</sup>

The next great international gathering of the Evangelicals in Manila, (often referred to as Lausanne II) also maintained the primacy of evangelism but affirmed the continuing commitment to social action - as we preach the Kingdom of God, we must be committed to its demands of justice and peace. The Manila manifesto said:

Evangelism is primary because our chief concern is with the gospel, that all people may have the opportunity to accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Yet Jesus not only proclaimed the Kingdom of God, he also demonstrated its

arrival by works of mercy and power. We are called today to a similar integration of words and deeds... We repent that the narrowness of our concerns and vision has often kept us from proclaiming the lordship of Jesus Christ over all of life, private and public, local and global. We determine to obey his command to "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness" <sup>32</sup>

It should be noted that in the Lausanne statement there was an underlying dichotomy between evangelism and social action. Though they accepted both as Christian responsibility, there was a division between social action and evangelism in their thinking, which David Bosch called the 'two-mandate approach'. Hence the Evangelicals spoke of priority in evangelism. The two-mandate approach, according to Bosch was inadequate and theologically insupportable, 'because it lacks the 'holism' of the New Testament, which binds the two together into a single obedience in discipleship' <sup>33</sup> This was one of the important issues that distinguished evangelical thinking from that of the Ecumenicals.

Despite the conciliatory tone of both Lausanne and Manila, there was still criticism of the World Council of Churches by some leading Evangelicals. In 1975 there appeared in Germany a book entitled: The Berlin Ecumenical Manifesto, on the Utopian Vision of the World Council of Churches, edited by Walter Kunneth and Peter Beyerhaus.<sup>34</sup> The book attacked not only the World Council of Churches but also the Lutheran World Federation, World Student Christian Federation, certain Roman Catholic groups, the German Evangelical Kirchentag, Taize, and to some extent even Lausanne.<sup>35</sup> According to H. Berkof, the common thread through all the articles in the book was the desire to demonstrate that the World Council of Churches no longer sought to proclaim the Gospel throughout the world, but strove rather for a purely horizontal, social and political, humanization and unification of mankind by means of religious pluralism and syncretism. "Unwearyingly, the authors point out again and again that with such a program the World Council of Churches is on the way to Anti-Christ. They believe that the last days are just around the corner... and that in the decisive hour the World Council will stand on the sides of the enemies of Christ".<sup>36</sup> Peter Beyerhaus, one of the editors of the book, deplored the influence of liberation theology on the missionary theology of the World Council of Churches. It was shocking for him to see how present day theologians and church leaders even drew parallels between the New Testament salvation and that salvation which is brought about by present day

ideologies and religions. "Jesus, as far as he is still referred to by them, is reduced to the type of liberation... from Cyrus to Mao Tse-tung ... this is a terrible distortion of the biblical Gospel of the kingdom".

H. Berkof points out that German theologians had played a leading part in the concentration of forces of evangelicalism by a combination of confessional Lutheranism and pietism. Though in its theological form it was German, in its doctrinal content it was ecumenical. "Not only in Europe and North America but equally even in Eastern Europe, Asia, Africa and Latin America, we find countless Christians with the same strongly held suspicions of the World Council of Churches or at any rate the same type of evangelical faith".<sup>37</sup> Then Berkof makes an important observation. He says that it is important to remember that there has been, in many respects, a substantial shift in the World Council of Churches since 1965.

The chief cause of this shift has not been lain in the WCC itself but in the rapid growth of tension between First and Third Worlds. The Council has taken this to be a critical challenge to which it has responded by increasing its statements and activities in the field of social and political ethics. New concepts like 'development', 'revolution', 'racism' and 'liberation' advance to the center of the stage. The press and other public media took a much closer interest in, and in a few years convey to the public quite a new image of WCC. Does this mean that there has been a fundamental change in the Council? The Berlin people think it does. <sup>38</sup>

Berlin Evangelicals also expressed the opinion that things were, in general, much better under Visser't Hooft.<sup>39</sup>

At Uppsala, M.M. Thomas from India, was elected as Chairman of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches. Philip Potter from Jamaica became its General Secretary in 1972. At the same time, Emilio Castro from Latin America was appointed as the Director of the Division of World Mission and Evangelism. The influence of theologians from the Third World was substantial at Bangkok. There was no doubt that the growing influence of the churches from the Third World in the ecumenical movement was part of the problem of the Evangelicals.

In July 1975, Donald McGavran and Peter Wagner addressed an open letter to Philip Potter warning him of the imminent prospect of a division among confessing Christians "as deep and lasting as that which took place in Europe in the sixteenth century". They spoke of the forthcoming Nairobi assembly of the World Council of Churches as a possible last opportunity to avoid such a rift, urging that the Assembly should reverse the trend of Uppsala-Bangkok.<sup>40</sup>

## Response of the World Council of Churches

The World Council of Churches was certainly aware of the Evangelicals' criticism of the ecumenical movement. John A. Mackay of Princeton Theological Seminary and a great ecumenical leader in the USA, was sympathetic to some of the concerns of the Evangelicals. In an article he wrote in 1966 in *Christianity Today* (an Evangelical Journal), he spoke of what the ecumenical movement could learn from the conservative Evangelicals. He pointed out the contribution which the Evangelicals could make in the sphere of mission, their emphasis on conversion, and in their stress on the Bible. The Evangelicals always insisted on Bible as the final rule of faith and practice and their criticism of the Ecumenicals was that they did not take the Bible seriously enough. In 1961, at the New Delhi Assembly, the basis of the World Council of Churches had been altered to include references to 'Scriptures' and 'Trinity'. It now reads that the World Council of Churches is a 'fellowship of Churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior according to the Scriptures and therefore seek to fulfil together their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit'. In order to explore deeper what it means to live, confess and act, 'according to the Scriptures' as Christians, Churches and a Council of Churches, the World Council of Churches established a portfolio of Biblical Studies in 1971. Bible studies have been central to the ecumenical movement from the very beginning. However, the World Council of Churches was aware that no form and no movement can escape the danger of misusing the Bible, of seeking only a 'Biblical rationale' for what is already thought and done. "One can easily become deaf to biblical judgement, gradually replacing the presence of the ever-astonishing Christ, witnessed to in Gospels, with a closed system of Christology or ideology". The portfolio was established with the hope that through its work, 'the voice of God of the Bible will be heard as a judging and renewing power in the Council's work'. Framing Bible study for the member churches was one of its tasks. The portfolio also had another purpose to serve - to become an

instrument in building up relationships with such groups as conservative Evangelicals and the renewal movements within the Roman Catholic Church. "Churches and persons involved at present in the World Council of Churches' life and work can learn much from the above mentioned groups; and, on the other hand, these groups need the correction and support of the ecumenical fellowship".<sup>41</sup>

The World Council was becoming increasingly aware of the fact that Evangelicals constituted a large proportion of the membership of the World Council of Churches. The real issue was not, therefore, 'Evangelical' versus 'Ecumenical', but instead, how the testimony of those who call themselves evangelical was to be taken as part and parcel of ecumenical life. The Division of World Mission and Evangelism of the WCC, under the leadership of its Director Philip Potter undertook a review of the World Council of Churches' role in evangelism, the report of which was presented to the Central Committee in 1967. Philip Potter, being sensitive to the charge that evangelism was a neglected vocation in the life of the Council, examined three questions: Is evangelism at the heart of the life and work of the Council? What does the World Council of Churches mean when it speaks of evangelism? What is to be done to manifest more evidently the central concern of the World Council of Churches and its member churches for evangelism?<sup>42</sup>

In 1973 a symposium on evangelism was held which included, amongst its delegates, a number of conservative Evangelicals. The discussions revealed a wide spectrum of views but also significant lines of convergence. At the end of the symposium, Visser't Hooft who was an observer at the meeting said, "I could put in one single phrase the importance of this meeting for me. It has for me largely demythologized the ecumenical-evangelical relationship".<sup>43</sup> It was not only the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME) in the World Council of Churches which gave greater attention to evangelism, but also other departments. In 1971 the Faith and Order Commission undertook a serious, study of 'Giving Account of the Hope that is in Us'. This was undertaken because the Commission was aware that "the one community is a confessing community, and the churches will, therefore, find the way to unity only if they learn to speak together of their common faith".<sup>44</sup>

### ***Nairobi Assembly, 1975***

The Fifth Assembly of the World Council of Churches was held in

Nairobi, Kenya from Nov 23-December 10, 1975. The theme of the Assembly was "Jesus Christ Frees and Unites". James A. Sherer points out that the Nairobi Assembly met at a time when the Churches of Africa, the Orthodox theologians, the Evangelical world and the Roman bishops were all giving attention to the meaning and practice of evangelism. Nairobi not only reflected these antecedents, but also sought to build bridges toward other Christian movements in relation to the missionary and evangelistic task.<sup>45</sup> The All Africa Conference of Churches at their meeting in 1974 gave special attention to evangelization of frontier situations. The World Council of Churches Commission on World Mission and Evangelism had convened a consultation of Orthodox theologians at Bucharest in 1974 on the subject of Confessing Christ Today, as a preparation for the Nairobi Assembly. At this meeting, Prof. Meyendorff mentioned that Confessing Christ Today "will be a major theme of the ecumenical dialogue in Nairobi. The mere adoption of such a theme represents a response to the wide spread criticism that the ecumenical movement has departed from its original Christian concern".<sup>46</sup> The Consultation made it clear that the uncommunicated Gospel (Good news) is a potent contradiction.

Two aspects of mission were emphasized by the consultation. On the one hand, mission was seen as confessing the activity of the Logos in all creation. The understanding of Christ as the Logos of God and the recovery of the doctrine of the cosmic Logos for missionary theology was strongly stressed. On the other hand, mission takes place in the context of struggle with and resistance to evil and sin, of overcoming divisions which prevail in the social world, in various forms of injustice and oppressions, and in the material world of sickness and death. The cross is the inevitable context of mission. By its nature, mission is first of all a clash between two ways of existence, between the new creation and the fallen world. The church's mission cannot build up the kingdom of God by historical process but can lead to a taste of the kingdom. Mission points to the event of communion which God offers to the world as the Body of Christ, the Church, that is a community in history which reflects the life of God as communion.<sup>47</sup>

In July 1974, the World Congress of the Evangelicals met in Lausanne. Finally, in October 1974 the Third General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops met in Rome to consider, "Evangelization in the Modern World". The Synod affirmed that the mandate to evangelize all people constitutes the essential mission of the church. Addressing the Roman Synod, Philip Potter, the General Secretary of the World Council of

Churches said that the ecumenical movement found its origin, amongst other things, in the requirements of evangelization that call for unity among Christians; the conviction of the World Council of Churches has been that evangelization is the ecumenical theme par excellence. This was the background of the Nairobi Assembly.

Evangelism received prominent attention in the plenary presentations of the Assembly. Bishop Mortimer Arias of the Evangelical Methodist Church in Bolivia spoke on the text. "That the World May Believe". Evangelism was highlighted in the report of the moderator. James A. Sherer observes, "The prominence of the evangelistic theme and the treatment it was given were surprising in view of the developments which took place between New Delhi and Uppsala. The earlier pre-occupation with mission in the secular world, and the sharp critique of churchly structures, were no longer prominent. In their place, Nairobi provided a churchly, confessional and triunitarian statement on mission. Nairobi marks the beginning of a new phase in the development of ecumenical mission theology, as seen in the attempt to reconcile 'churchly' and 'worldly' approach to mission".<sup>48</sup>

Bishop Mortimer Arias spoke of evangelism as the primary calling and responsibility of the churches and drew equally on the Lausanne Congress and the Roman Catholic Synod of Bishops as evidence. He proposed a holistic approach - the whole Gospel for the whole man for the whole world - rejecting equally a reduction of evangelism to- 'saving souls' and of the Gospel to a program of service or social action. He stressed that evangelism must be integral in content as well as in form, in the inseparable union of word and action; and it must be contextual. The Gospel cannot be authentic unless it is faithful both to the Scriptures and to real people in real contexts. Speaking of the unity of the church, Arias said that we are not seeking unity per se, but that the world may believe. We are sustained in the evangelistic task not only by the horror of a world without Christ, or by gratitude, but above all by the all-powerful intercession of him who prays, "That all may be one that the world may believe". Recalling the vision behind the act of integration of the International Missionary Council and the World Council of Churches, and the commitment made in New Delhi, Arias said "we have not always been faithful to our recognized calling; we have not always given priority to what ought to be our priorities; we have not always been worthy of our predecessors from Edinburgh 1910 to Mexico 1963; and we have not always fulfilled the hopes which gave rise to the WCC and its merging with the IMC". Hence he called the

## World Council of Churches to confession and repentance.<sup>49</sup>

John Stott, the British Evangelical leader, who played a prominent role at Lausanne Conference, in his response to Arias' speech pointed out five things which the World Council of Churches should recover.

1. A recognition of the lostness of man. According to the New Testament, men and women are not anonymous Christians already in Christ and only needing to be told so. They are dead in their trespasses and sins. Universalism is a deadly enemy of evangelism;
2. Confidence in the truth, relevance and power of the gospel of God;
3. Conviction about the uniqueness of Jesus Christ. Of course there is truth in other religions and ideologies. But Paul's argument in Romans is not that the knowledge of God saves men but they are without excuse because they suppress it;
4. A sense of urgency about evangelism; and
5. A personal experience of Jesus Christ: the greatest of all obstacles to evangelism today is the poverty of our own spiritual experience.

John Stott ended his response by saying, "We are all conscious, I think, of the wide gap of confidence and credibility which exists today between ecumenical leaders and evangelicals, between Geneva and Lausanne. "What do we do about this"?"

Ecumenical leaders genuinely question whether evangelicals have a heartfelt commitment to social action. We evangelicals say that we have, but I personally recognise that we have got to supply more evidence that we have. On the other hand, evangelicals question whether the WCC has a heartfelt commitment to worldwide evangelism. They say they have, but I beg the Assembly to supply me more evidence that this is so.<sup>50</sup>

The participants as a whole were appreciative of Arias' address. Jan Achimuk of the Orthodox Church in Poland later wrote that the most impressive feature of Bishop Arias' speech was his forcefully expressed conviction that the proclamation of the Good News is not limited to the

transmission of the content of the Gospel and of Christian doctrine, but that a loving, quiet, and respectful participation in the life of our neighbors, a readiness to help and to be involved in their everyday concerns, belongs to the very essence of proclamation.<sup>51</sup>

While agreeing with Bishop Arias' holistic approach to mission, Metropolitan Osthathios of the Syrian Orthodox Church in India disagreed with the statement that unity is sought, not for its own sake, but for the sake of evangelism. For the Metropolitan, the unity of the church was not just a means but an end in itself. "That the world may believe" was the natural outcome and not the intentional effect, of unity. "The lighted candle dispels the darkness as the consequence of being a light. Similarly the world believes in Jesus Christ when the Christians become true Christians, the church the authentic body of Christ. 'That the world may believe' is the outcome of the manifestation of holiness, equality and unity modeled on the Holy Triunitarian structure," the Metropolitan said. He also took strong exception to the emphasis on 2000 million who are lost as the motivation for mission.

My evangelical brothers are in the habit of numbering the lost and those who have never heard of the gospel. I feel that this is a very wrong approach - biblically, theologically, psychologically and factually. Biblically we are not permitted to judge before the time. Theologically, in the words of Arias himself, "the grace of God is not confined to the church". Psychologically, it creates a superiority complex in the mind of the 'saved', and those who are approached with the gospel see the arrogance in our approach. Factually, no one knows exactly the number of those who have never heard the Gospel, and the number of those who have heard and yet did not hear it. And did not our Lord say: "Not everyone who calls me 'Lord, Lord' will enter the kingdom of God, but only those who do the will of my heavenly father (Matt:7:2)".<sup>52</sup>

The Metropolitan pointed out that there was a need to find a new motivation for mission and evangelism other than 'lostness' of the so called 'lost'. Mission must become the spontaneous expression of the joy of Christian discipleship. We preach the Gospel to those who have never heard of the Gospel because we cannot contain the sense of release from sin and the joy of salvation. Hence evangelism is the

sharing of a joy which is freely given to us by Christ.

The subject of evangelism was drawn into the center of attention of the Assembly by M.M. Thomas in his moderator's report.<sup>53</sup> Thomas said that since New Delhi, ecumenism had been marked by two thrusts which made it theologically distinct from the position of the earlier period of the World Council of Churches. First, the theological impact of the integration of Faith and Order, Life and Work and the missionary movements. It has produced interaction between unity, mission and service at theological and spiritual depth; each has been forced to define itself more explicitly in the context of the other two. Secondly, a deeper awareness of the contemporary realities of the world has made its own theological impact on ecumenism. This has been experienced through three channels. The large number of churches of eastern Europe, Africa, Asia and the Pacific, the Caribbean and Latin America, have brought with them into the Council the hopes, the aspirations, and struggles of their peoples, races and nations. For the first time, they have ceased to be external objects for observations and have become internal subjective realities of the Council's fellowship. The Council has also listened to the poor, the marginalized, the oppressed people with a new sensitivity. Further, the lay experts with whom the Council has consulted on social questions, and the social scientists and politicians who have come together with theologians to consider their own Christian vocation or the church's mission in the secular world, have brought to the Council a new awareness of the problems and tasks facing the contemporary world. As a result, most of our traditional understandings of and responses to the world lie shattered, and this demands of us fresh theological explorations at many levels. "The Council has come to realize that life and mission of the Church must be rethought in the context of, and in challenging relevance to, the human issues agitating mankind in our present historical situation. And, conversely, it has also realized that the contemporary world is prepared to listen to the Church's interpretation of the human issues of our time only if this interpretation is set within the context of the Church's faith in, and witness to, the renewal of all things in Jesus Christ". Thomas clearly pointed out how human issues are directly related to our concerns for Christian unity.<sup>54</sup>

Since the church and the world exist for each other in the Gospel, radical thinking is necessary in the concept and form of world evangelism. Referring to the Bangkok Assembly of the WCC, The International Congress in Lausanne, the Bishops' Synod in Rome on

evangelism in the modern world, and the Orthodox Consultation on Confessing Christ today, Thomas said that theological convergence in these meetings is striking in three points: Firstly, in their emphasis on the whole gospel for the whole man in the whole world; secondly, in their effort to relate evangelism to the identity of the church and to its growth, renewal and unity; and thirdly, in their affirmation of the realities of the contemporary world. For Thomas, these meetings and consultations are to be considered as conversations and encounters within the ecumenical movement. "Precisely because of this convergence, it is worth looking at the remaining divergences in the concept of evangelism, so that our dialogue at this Assembly may be more ecumenical . Speaking of the Bangkok theme, 'Salvation Today', Thomas pointed out that the consensus of Bangkok, Lausanne, and Rome with regard to the understanding of salvation comes at three points - the affirmation of its comprehensive nature, the recognition of the eschatological basis for historical action, and the understanding of the church as a sign and bearer of salvation.<sup>55</sup>

The moderator's report also dealt with some of the criticisms raised against the World Council of Churches. Referring to the criticism made by Peter Beyerhaus and some others that in the World Council's emphasis on social and political justice there is present a social utopianism which denies the fact of sin and affirms a self-redemptive humanism, Thomas admitted that the danger is always present, but pointed out the opposite danger of not admitting the fact of divine grace and the power of righteousness it releases for a daring faith in the realms of social and political action. "And often anti-utopianism", he said, "lays itself open to the suspicion that it is not an expression of faith but an ideology of the status quo and excuse for non-participation in human liberation in history."<sup>56</sup> It is the task of ecumenical theology to warn us against both these dangers, he said. For example, Thomas referred to the Faith and Order discussions on "Giving Account of our hope that is within us" where it is clearly affirmed that "the future of perfected humanity lies in the fullness of the Godhead" beyond this side of history where sin and death prevail. But our hope in the coming of the Kingdom of God in Jesus Christ takes on the character of concrete utopia, that is, an idea of our aim and a critical point of reference for our action in society. This provides us with an incentive to participate in efforts to build a more human social order in the perspective of the Kingdom of God. The Faith and Order statement then went on to point out how every social order is limited by the 'continuing sinfulness of man' which are meant to protect human beings in society. Given this limitation,

"concrete social utopias can correspond to the eschatological reality of the Kingdom of God".<sup>57</sup>

In August 1973, Patriarch Pimen of Moscow and the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church wrote a letter to the Central Committee of the WCC, drawing the attention of the Committee to the statement of the Bangkok Conference on salvation. The letter stressed that the salvation completed by our Lord Jesus Christ and which is being realized through the action of the Holy Spirit constitutes the unshakeable foundation for the whole life and activities of the church. The truth of salvation is the very essence and the center of the Christian Gospel as a whole and it is the sacred responsibility of Christians to confess this truth and to safeguard its purity and wholeness. The essence of the truth of salvation should be understood or explained in full faithfulness to the Word of God and to the abiding tradition of the church. With regard to the Bangkok documents, the letter said:

Perplexity and great regret are aroused by the fact that in the 'Letter to the Churches' there is no significant reference - and primarily from the pastoral point of view - to that dimension of the process of salvation without which the very concept of salvation loses its implication. Nothing is said about the ultimate goal of salvation, in other words, about the eternal life in God; nor does anything point to moral improvement and perfection as an indispensable condition for the achievement of this goal... It is only just to say that every man has an inherent right to favorable conditions for him to enjoy all-round development in his striving for a full-blooded life... However one cannot agree with the opinion that where there are no conditions of life worthy of man one cannot even speak of salvation today. For salvation is not an adjunct to human existence or an 'excess' available only for those who are already in favorable condition, but is a bringing of man to a fullness of being from the state he is in now. This action by God demands hard human effort too and is carried out, if necessary, by the struggle against exploitation and injustice.<sup>58</sup>

Thomas in his reply also referred to the Declaration of the Ecumenical Patriarchate on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the WCC in 1973. Thomas accepted the criticism of the Orthodox Churches. He

said:

The Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church has felt sometimes the WCC has not placed its thinking on the social content of salvation solidly within the perspective of the ultimate goal of salvation ... the eternal life in God, "with the result that appropriation of eternal life is made to depend on social conditions rather than social conditions on the appropriation of eternal life"; and the Ecumenical Patriarchate has warned us that in "turning towards the anguish of the man today", the WCC must not forget the basic truth that man sees himself as hungering for an answer to a basic question over and beyond his acute interest in the most vital socio-political problems of the day." The question is: What is the reason for man's existence on earth, as a living person, as an ethical personality, as an entity stretching out towards something beyond this present life and finally embracing the eschaton? <sup>59</sup>These comments and warnings must be heeded. For the historical and ethical dimensions of life will be handled superficially if we lack 'awareness of their ontological and eschatological roots. But here again the point has been made by the Orthodox themselves that the hunger for meaning and eternal life is not merely 'over and beyond' but also 'within and through' the anguished longing for humanity. As Uppsala 1968 said, it is in the very cry arising out of the conditions of contemporary existence that the Church can discern that the deepest cry, albeit often unrecognized, is for the Triune God.<sup>60</sup> According to the Bucharest Orthodox Consultation on "Confessing Christ Today", the Church's mission is ultimately concerned with pointing to a quality of existence which reflects that of the Trinity; at this point, the anthropological, sociological, and ecclesiological concerns of the Church overlap; they all point towards "the event of communion which God offers to the world as the Body of Christ, the Church".<sup>61</sup>

With regard to the evangelical insistence on the priority of evangelism, Thomas said that people are not isolated individuals but are social beings inextricably related to the structures of nature, history and cosmos through which they express the creativity of their freedom as

well as the sin of self-love and self-righteousness. Persons, society and cosmos interpenetrate one another in the unity of human existence. Therefore, if salvation from sin through divine forgiveness is to be truly and fully personal it must express itself in the renewal of these relations and structures. Such a renewal is not a consequence but an essential element of the conversion of the whole human beings.

In answer to the criticism that WCC is syncretistic because of its program for inter-religious dialogue, Thomas said that if the word syncretism denotes all processes of interpenetration between cultures and religions, the only answer to a wrong syncretism, which means the uncritical, superficial, normless mixing of basically incompatible religious concepts and cultural attitudes, is a Christ-centered syncretism which grapples with and evaluates all concepts and attitudes critically in the light of Jesus Christ and converts them into vehicles for communicating the truth of the Gospel and for expressing its meaning for life. "Acknowledging the common humanity given in Christ, can we not work with men of all religions and no religions for a secular human culture and community, and even for a secular humanism open to insights from all religions and ideologies, evaluated in the light of, Lad informed by, the true manhood of Jesus Chris?", he asked.<sup>62</sup>

When Thomas spoke of convergence, not all evangelicals agreed with him. John Stott, the British evangelical, pointed out that Lausanne had drawn a sharp distinction between salvation and political liberation and he was conscious of a wide divergence between Geneva and Lausanne. About this Thomas wrote later, "In a speech on evangelism given by the British evangelical, John Stott, he criticized me for seeing too much convergence in the theologies of evangelism of the Lausanne Conference 1974, the Roman Catholic Bishops' Synod 1974, and the WCC Bangkok Consultation 1973. He wanted to emphasize the divergence between Lausanne and Bangkok, while others were happy that I had pointed out the convergence"<sup>63</sup> John Milic Lochman of the University of Basel, referring to the Moderator's report later wrote, "He tried to point out ecumenical bridges to other movements, especially the Synod of Bishops in Rome and the Lausanne Congress. He was clearly anxious to develop something in the name of a common Cantus firmus in the matter of evangelism in spite of differences of emphasis. John Stott promptly called his attempt 'over optimistic' and this judgement was probably not entirely wrong. It seems to me, however, that the intention of M.M. Thomas's report is clearly welcomed: especially in this matter the World Council should not pursue its own individual line.

Evangelism is its traditional and permanent task". <sup>64</sup>

### *Confessing Christ Today*

In the section report in 'Confessing Christ Today', the Assembly expressed its commitment to evangelism and social action. In introducing the report, William Lazareth acknowledged the help received from the reports of the Bangkok Conference on Salvation Today, of the Lausanne Congress on the evangelization of the world, and of the Synod of Bishops of the Roman Catholic Church on evangelization in the modern world. He spoke briefly on the way in which the report moved from a bold confession of Christ alone as Savior and Lord to emphasize the Confessing Christ as an Act of Conversion. There are many different cultures in which the one Christ was to be confessed, and in them Christ is confessed especially by the Confessing Community of the Church in its Witness and Life. The report ends with a call to confess the whole Gospel to the whole person and the whole world, urgently, intelligently and imaginatively.<sup>65</sup>

Nairobi was, without doubt, a Christ-centric Assembly. In unambiguous terms, the report said that we boldly confess Christ alone as Savior and Lord. Jesus Christ is the one, true and faithful witness to God. His name is above every other name "that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.(Phil. 2:10-11)" To confess Jesus Christ is to be engaged in both evangelism and social action.

As our high priest, Christ mediates God's new covenant through both salvation and service. Through the power of the cross, Christ promises God's righteousness and commands true justice. As the royal priesthood, Christians are called to engage in both evangelism and social action. We are commissioned to proclaim the gospel of Christ to the ends of the earth. Simultaneously, we are committed to struggle to realize God's will for peace, justice and freedom through out society.<sup>66</sup>

Confessing Christ and being converted to His discipleship belong inseparably together. "Without clear confession of Christ our discipleship cannot be recognized; without costly discipleship people will hesitate to believe our confession". Hence the report deplored cheap

conversions. The report rejected all divisions in the thinking and practice between personal and corporate dimensions. "The whole gospel for the whole person and the whole world" means that we cannot leave any area of human life and suffering without the witness of hope. The report affirmed the necessity of confessing Christ as specifically as possible with regard to our own cultural settings. Though there is a great diversity in our confessions of Christ, nevertheless through the illumination of the Holy Spirit, we are able to recognize Him in the proclamation of Christians in cultural settings different from our own. This is possible because we confess Christ as God and Savior according to the Scriptures. With regard to dialogue with people of other faiths, the report said:

We believe that in addition to listening to one another, we need to know what people of other faiths and no faith are saying about Jesus Christ and his followers. While we cannot agree on whether or how Christ is present in other religions, we do believe that God has not left himself without witness in any generation or society. Nor can we exclude the possibility that God speaks to Christians from outside the Church. While we oppose any form of syncretism, we affirm the necessity for dialogue with men and women of other faiths and ideologies as a means of mutual understanding and practical co-operation.<sup>67</sup>

The report identified number of structures and social factors that obscure the confession of Christ. such as the structures of social oppression, economic structures, and structures of sexism. The report stated it is not only societal power structures that can obscure the confession of Christ. Sometimes the institutional structures of the churches themselves are oppressive and dehumanizing; often they uncritically reflect the values of their own cultures. "Where churches are identified with wealth and privilege both the preaching and the hearing of the gospel are hindered and Christ is obscured". Yet, the report stressed:

Despite all our cultural differences, despite the structures in society and in the Church that obscure our confession of Christ, and despite our sinfulness, we affirm and confess Christ together, for we have found that he is not alien to any culture and that he redeems and judges all our societies. Our common confession is "Jesus Christ frees

and unites".<sup>68</sup>

The report made it clear that confessing Christ is a communal activity, the activity of the community in the spirit. "Those who take part in the life of Christ and confess him as Lord and savior, liberator and unifier, are gathered in a community of which the author and sustainer is the Holy Spirit. The communion of the spirit finds its primary aim and ultimate purpose in the eucharistic celebration and glorification of the Triune God. The doxology is the supreme confession which transcends all our division"<sup>69</sup>

The report made a call to express and proclaim the whole Gospel to the whole person throughout the whole world by the whole church. The Gospel is Good News from God. It always includes :announcement of God's Kingdom and love through Jesus Christ, the offer of grace and forgiveness of sins, the invitation to repentance and faith in him, the summons to fellowship in God's church, the command to witness to God's saving words and deeds, the responsibility to participate in the struggle for justice and human dignity, the obligation to denounce all that hides human wholeness, and a commitment to risk life itself. In the process of communicating the Gospel throughout the world, the Spirit discloses ever-new aspects and dimensions of God's decisive revelation in Jesus Christ. It speaks to our particular situation and context. In our time, to the oppressed, the Gospel may be new as a message to persevere in the struggle for liberation; to women the Gospel may bring news of a Christ who empowered women to be bold in the midst of cultural expectations of submissiveness; to children the Gospel may be a call of love for the little ones; and to the rich and powerful it may reveal the responsibility to share the poverty of the poor. The Gospel, through the power of the Holy Spirit, speaks to all human needs and transforms our lives. Because God so loved the whole world, the church cannot neglect any part of it - any person or group, or any aspect of life in the world. Evangelism cannot be delegated to either gifted individuals or specialized agencies. It is entrusted to the whole church. The report called the churches to begin the evangelization of the world at the level of local congregations, in the local and ecumenical dimension of its life : worship, sacrament, preaching, teaching, healing, fellowship and service, witnessing in life and in death.<sup>70</sup>

The subject of the church's mission and service was raised and discussed in other presentations in the Assembly and in other section reports. For example, Michael Manley, the Prime Minister of Jamaica

spoke on the subject "From the Shackles of Domination and Oppression", in the plenary. He pointed out that the churches have a clear duty to make common cause with the Third World in the search for a new world order. Christendom cannot cease from struggle until outrages that violate our faith are ended. The Third World needs to be clear about its moral foundation and set its own house in order by tackling the internal injustices among its members. He said:

I am concerned, therefore, that whereas the churches must first be concerned with Christian witness as it relates to personal salvation, they also have an historical mission to assist in the definition, validation, and articulation of just political, economic, and social objectives; and the 'men of God' ought to equip themselves to help the political leader renew his moral insight.<sup>71</sup>

Similarly, Charles Birch of Sydney spoke on 'Creation, Technology and Human Survival' and told the Assembly that our goal must be a just and sustainable society; and this demands a fundamental change of heart and mind about humankind's relation to nature. "If", he said, "we are to break the poverty barrier for almost two-thirds of the earth's people, if we are to continue to inhabit the earth, there has to be a revolution in the relationship of human beings to one another. The churches of the world have now to choose whether or not they became part of the revolution"<sup>72</sup> Birch's speech brought to a clear focus the church's responsibility to creation, which later became a major concern of the World Council of Churches.

Nairobi Assembly was called at a time when the evangelicals, the Orthodox, the Roman Catholics were giving special attention to evangelism. It also took place at a time when the evangelicals severely criticized the WCC for its lack of proper direction in evangelism. The Russian Orthodox Church also criticized the World Council of Churches' understanding of Salvation Today. Yet, M.M. Thomas has pointed out in his Moderator's report that there were convergences between the evangelicals, the Orthodox and Roman Catholics at some important points. At the Assembly itself, as the plenary presentation and section reports indicate, efforts were made to listen to various viewpoints, promote reconciliation and arrive at consensus. By the end of the Assembly, as Kenneth Slack pointed out, "most of the members felt that there was more danger from undue stress on the evangelism of individuals than the other way round, despite widely expressed anxiety,

given expression by Stott, that liberation in political, social and economic sense was in danger of replacing salvation from sin at the heart of the redeeming gospel".<sup>73</sup> There was no doubt that, despite the narrowing of the range of disagreements, important differences continued, especially with regard to the meaning of salvation and the program of dialogue with people of other faiths.

At Nairobi, as Philip Potter said, none of the prophetic positions of the World Council was repudiated, including the most contentious program to combat racism. It refused to divide faith from action, evangelism from socio-political movement, and evangelical from ecumenist. It did not shirk from facing the issues which divide the world, our churches and ourselves as men and women, white and black, rich and poor. The participants were asking their churches and themselves to be more closely and extensively identified with the poor and the oppressed and to find new styles of living to express more credibly the identification.<sup>74</sup>

Nairobi did not repudiate or try to reverse the trend of Uppsala and Bangkok, as Donald McGavran and Peter Wagner wanted. However, the statement of Stephen Neill that Nairobi probably saved the World Council of Churches, was an exaggeration.<sup>75</sup>

It is important that channels of communications are maintained between the evangelicals and the ecumenicals. They need to heed and respond to each other and discover one another as partners in a common missionary calling. Dialogue between them is necessary for an holistic understanding of mission. In dialogue there is always openness and reception. Very often, as the history of the church demonstrates, creative and sound theological thinking took shape in dialogue and discussions with alternative points of view.

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# **Edinburgh to Salvador: Twentieth Century Ecumenical Missiology by T.V. Philip**

T. V. Philip, born in India and a lay member of the Mar Thoma Church, has worked and taught in India, Europe, USA and Australia. He is a church historian, and a former Professor at the United Theological College, Bangalore, India. This book was published jointly by CSS and ISPCK, 1999, Kashmere Gate, Delhi, India. This material was prepared for Religion Online by Ted and Winnie Brock.

## **Chapter 6: The Kingdom of God and Mission**

A church-centric view of mission had been slowly developing in the ecumenical movement since the conference in Edinburgh in 1910. By the Madras conference, the Church had become the central concern of the missionary movement. Madras confidently asserted that the hope for the redemption of humankind centered in God's work through the Church. It was this church-centric view of mission that was challenged by Stanley Jones and others like him. The complaint of Stanley Jones was that while Jesus went about preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom, Madras went about preaching the Gospel of the Church. According to Stanley Jones, the Kingdom is absolute while the Church is only relative. A group of theologians in India known as the 'Re-thinking Group (a result of their book, *Re-thinking Christianity*, published just before the Madras Conference), was of the same opinion as Jones. One of them, P. Chenchiah, felt that the institutional church was trying to usurp the place of the Kingdom. He wrote:

Christianity took the wrong gradient when it left the Kingdom of God for the Church... Christianity is a failure because we made a new religion of it instead of a new creation... The Church arrested the Kingdom when Peter added 3000 unto them - a fatal day for the Kingdom and a

glorious day for the Church.<sup>1</sup>

J.C. Hoekendijk was also a strong critic of the church-centric view of mission. In his missionary scheme, it was the Kingdom of God and the world that occupied the central place and not the church. Though the criticism of Hoekendijk and others did not result immediately in a radical re-appraisal of missionary theology, it began to show results later. After 1960, the world became the focus of attention in ecumenical missionary theology and, by 1980, the Kingdom of God became its central concern. It was not a theological interest in the Kingdom as such, but in the Kingdom of God as it is related to the world.

According to Johannes Verkul, a Dutch missiologist, the whole of the church's deep and wide mission agenda must receive its focus and orientation from the perspective of the Kingdom. Writing in 1979, just before the Melbourne Conference, he pointed out that contemporary writers such as Max Warren, Hans Margull, D.T. Niles, Moltmann, Rutti, and several others viewed mission in such a perspective. He said that it was gratifying to be able to see that "the missionary movement is more and more coming to see the Kingdom of God as the hub around which all missions work will revolve".<sup>2</sup>

It is no surprise that the main theme of the next two missionary conferences organized by the World Council of Churches was the Kingdom of God. The theme of the Melbourne Conference in 1980 was, "Your Kingdom Come";, and the next one in San Antonio in 1989 had as its theme, "Your Will Be Done - Mission in Christ's Way".

Both for John R. Mott and J.H. Oldham, the moving spirits behind the Edinburgh conference and the pioneers of the modern ecumenical movement, the Kingdom of God occupied the central place in Christian faith and mission. They were inspired by a vision of "the large dimensions of the Kingdom of God". By choosing the theme of the Kingdom of God for Melbourne and San Antonio, the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME) of the World Council of Churches was acknowledging its own heritage.

## **Melbourne 1980**

The next World Missionary Conference, after Bangkok, was held in Melbourne, Australia from May 12-24, 1980. There were five hundred participants from eighty-three countries and their attention was focussed

on the theme, 'Your Kingdom Come'. Philip Potter, General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, in his inaugural address spoke of the Council as being the inheritor of the great missionary movement. He added, "The theme of the Kingdom, affirmed in the context of prayer, has been dominant in all the World Missionary Conferences up to the last in Bangkok, 1972 on "Salvation Today". It is not surprising that the clearest expression of the Kingdom was in the prayers that the participants at Bangkok composed as they wrestled with the Salvation which Christ offered"<sup>3</sup> He then quoted from those prayers:

Father, so many of the forms of this world are passing away... Help us to see that your Son has come into this world to transform it as Lord... Let not this world be changed without me being also changed. Convert me and I shall be converted. Let your judgement come in the Christ who is to come. And let us hasten his coming in the community that seeks his justice. Maranatha. Amen.

O God...

You have sent your Son in one place and time, We praise You!

Be present in every time and place, We pray You!

Your kingdom has come in his salvation, We pray You!

Let it come always among us, We pray You!<sup>4</sup>

Several speakers reminded the Assembly that the context of the conference theme was the Lord's prayer and its task was to pray for the coming of the Kingdom. Soritua Nababan of Indonesia, the Moderator of the CWME, invited the participants to join in a process of prayer, reflection, search and obedience on the theme "Your Kingdom Come", and yet to pray expectantly, for the Kingdom in all its fullness is still to come.<sup>5</sup> Krister Stendhal in his Bible study pointed out that the Lord's prayer was a sustained cry for the coming of the Kingdom. Commenting on the verse, 'Hallowed be your name' Stendhal said that the meaning of it was not that we are urged to hallow or sanctify God's name. A prayer is a prayer to God not a veiled form of moral instructions. People pray to God for the time when the whole creation will recognize God for what He is in His holiness and in His mighty acts. Again, referring to the verse, 'Your will be done', Stendhal

stressed that it was a prayer to God that His will for redemption, for the salvation of creation, be done. "In this prayer, we here on earth pray that God lift us all into His gracious and heavenly will and plan and overcome our resistance, our fears, our selfishness: Be it on earth as in heaven".<sup>6</sup> Emilio Castro, the Director of the CWME in his address said:

We are in a spiritual struggle and we are searching here for spiritual resources. The struggles to overcome oppressions have economic, social and political manifestations that should be considered on their own merits. But at the root there is a spiritual reality : principalities, powers of evil that need to be combated with spiritual powers and spiritual realities : the power of love the power of hope, the power of the Gospel. To pray, to worship, is essential for our conference.<sup>7</sup>

The theme of the conference, in the first place, came as a call to pray. The Kingdom of God is God's gift and not the work of men and women. "Fear not little flock, for it is the Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom". Christian and church communities are credible only as long as people hear issuing from them the passionate cry: Your Kingdom come.<sup>8</sup>

Secondly, the theme of Melbourne was a call to confess. It was a call to believe that the Kingdom of God had come in the King, Jesus of Nazareth. This was highlighted in most of the plenary presentations at the conference. Emilio Castro in his address: Your Kingdom come: A Missionary Perspective, said:

We proclaim that the Kingdom has come in the King, Jesus of Nazareth. Leslie Newbigin has reminded us that it is easier to say "your Kingdom come" than to pray, "Maranatha, come Lord Jesus". With the expression 'Kingdom', we are related to all the dreams of humankind it would be difficult to find a people whose religion, or ideology, does not expect a new day in the future. But when we confess our faith in Jesus Christ as Lord, we make a particular affirmation: We are calling people to recognize in the events of Golgotha and of the garden tomb, the redeeming and saving power of God with consequences for all humankind.<sup>9</sup>

The Metropolitan Geevarughese Mar Osthathios of the Indian Orthodox Church and Julie Esquivel from Guatemala also spoke of the relationship between the Kingdom of God and Jesus Christ who was crucified and risen. The whole emphasis of Ernst Kasemann in his address, "The Eschatological Royal Reign of God" was that the royal reign of God had been inaugurated in the life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. Speaking of the difference between the ministry of John the Baptist and that of Jesus of Nazareth, he said:

Between the Baptist and the one who brings the eschatological kingdom there are two key differences. Firstly, God's royal reign is not merely imminent but has already begun in Jesus' message and ministry. And secondly, when the power of the devil has been shattered, salvation is no longer limited in principle to the frontiers of Israel. A new world begins. Pentecost hoves in sight; when the heavens open, the Holy Spirit acquires elbow room, and the pantocrator is glorified even by the Gentiles.<sup>10</sup>

Kasemann recalled that Origen of Alexandria called Jesus 'autobasileia', the royal reign of God in person. It was this, Kasemann said, that marked the distinction between the Christian view of the Kingdom of God and the Jewish view. For Judaism, the Kingdom of God was not simply a new structure. It was associated with the coming of the King. It had also connected the eschatological kingdom with the appearance of a Messiah on the scene, even if this view was not universal. The Messiah was generally thought of as being only a fore runner, i.e. as one who brought political liberation to Israel. "But in the Christian message, the Savior had become not just the flesh of Israel or exclusively that of its pious members, but the flesh of all humanity, and is now and to all eternity the mediator and revealer, the face of God, so to speak, turned towards the earth and its creatures".<sup>11</sup> He is the way and the door, the shepherd, the bread and the water of life, the unique word of the Father and the sole interpreter of the Father. God has made Him the one Lord and the Messiah.<sup>12</sup> He will abolish every kind of domination, authority and power and He is destined to reign until God has put all enemies under His feet.<sup>13</sup> He is enthroned at God's right hand in the heavenly realms, "far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come".<sup>14</sup> Kasemann went on:

As far as Christianity is concerned, there is no eschatological divine reign of which Jesus of Nazareth is not the center. According to Luke 4:43, it was his earthly task to proclaim the Good News of the kingdom; for his disciples he became the presence of the kingdom with all its wealth of gifts and powers.<sup>15</sup>

To see Jesus of Nazareth at the center of the royal reign of God, says Kasemann, is the distinguishing mark of Christianity. "For us the Kingdom of God is not primarily theory but praxis. Nor is it a praxis concerned mainly with changed conditions, new possibilities and goals. From the New Testament, the Christian standpoint, the kingdom of God denotes that praxis in which Jesus of Nazareth is our Lord and Saviour of the world".<sup>16</sup>

Undoubtedly, Melbourne's emphasis was on Christology. Jacques Mathey was right when he said that Melbourne was a Christological conference. He wrote, "The preparatory process, the introductory speeches, the worship life, Bible studies and the report testify to the fact that whatever we may do in mission is rooted in God's final revelation in Jesus Christ. To speak of God's reign is to speak of Jesus; to preach Christ is to proclaim the kingdom of God". This does not mean that one can find in the Melbourne documents fully developed, systematic, Christological statements. "Rather Melbourne's reflection centered around a specific missionary aspect of Christology stressed in the presentation of Ernst Kasemann: the identity of the resurrected or elevated kyrios, Christ, the Lord, with the earthly Jesus, the Jew, the Nazarene, who lived as a simple Galilean man, suffered and was executed, dying on the cross."<sup>17</sup>

Melbourne not only confessed Jesus of Nazareth as the center of the royal reign of God, but it also stressed that as Christ's Kingdom, the royal reign of God begins on earth as the kingdom of the crucified, which places his disciples with him under the cross.<sup>18</sup> He did not come to be served, but 'to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many. He abandoned his equality with God and took the form of a slave. The power of his resurrection is experienced in the fellowship of his sufferings, which brings us into conformity with his death. "The king of the heavenly kingdom is still travelling the roads of this world. When he is sought in the wrong places and proclaimed under false colors, he has been completely misunderstood. Only where deliverance is needed is he to be found, i.e. as Psalm 107:10 tells us, only among those who sit "in

darkness, dark as death, prisoners, bound fast in iron".<sup>19</sup> Metropolitan Osthathios told the conference, "We say we have a Gospel of the kingdom to preach, and we preach everything under **the** sun except Jesus Christ crucified".<sup>20</sup>

Thirdly, the theme "Your Kingdom come" was a call for mission. It was this aspect of the theme which received the highest priority in Melbourne. All speakers touched on this question. Section presentations and discussions were all related to the mission of the church. Melbourne was a conference on mission: How the Kingdom of God is to be announced to the world, announced as Good News. It spoke of a "non-imperialistic evangelism, a faithful evangelism that aims at the transformations and permeation of societies from within; looks to the kingdom that is coming as the recapitulation of all things in Jesus Christ".<sup>21</sup> Melbourne spoke of the kingdom as the goal of mission, the poor as a new missionary yardstick, and the Church as an agent of mission and a sacrament of the kingdom. It called for the church's participation in the struggles of the world and for new structures and new missionary life-style. It recognized that the whole church is sent into mission and that all it does has to be seen as part of its calling - worship, parish life, diaconia, developmental work, pastoral work, catechetical instructions, interventions in political life, etc.<sup>22</sup>

According to Kasemann, the sovereignty of Christ meant a declaration of war against the principalities and powers of this world which enslave people and creation. He reminded the conference of Jesus' reply to those who warned him of Herod's plan to kill him. "Listen, today and tomorrow I shall be casting out devils and working cures; on the third day I shall reach my goal". Kasemann pointed out that time and again the Gospels narrate the healing of possessed persons, which then continues in the Acts of the Apostles; the New Testament letters, especially the "Revelation of John", celebrate the triumph of the Risen Christ as redemption from captivity to the powers and authorities, meaning by this, all who torment and seduce the world and individual human beings, and alienate them from their humanity, are thrown out of their power. Jesus was not a revolutionary. Nevertheless, his appearance on the scene has revolutionary consequences which were inescapable. Kasemann went on to say that for too long we have made Christianity an inward and private affair, the Holy Spirit into merely the power of sanctification in the Church, comforting ourselves and others with the prospect of eternal life beyond our temporal afflictions. Mission has meant, for the most part, the salvation of souls. Diaconia has been the

demonstration of love for the weak and the suffering. "The new earth remained a dream; co-operation in changing the structures was left to outsiders and mostly fanatics. The proclamation of the resurrection of the dead was normally, therefore, only a message of personal survival after death, for which the tombstones were in order but none of the victory signs that represent a threat to civil order".<sup>23</sup> If Jesus' conviction that he cast out demons by the power of God was true, then all these must change. Kasemann continued:

Through him [Jesus], the reign of God was carried into the demonic kingdom but not finally and universally completed there. He established signs showing that this kingdom had drawn near and that the struggle with the powers and authorities of this age had begun. We are not called to do more, but neither are we called to do less. But this means that instead of leaving the demonic kingdom in peace we attack it here, there and everywhere, as witnesses of the resurrection from the dead, as instruments of the Spirit of God who does not share his sovereignty with idols but fetches his originally good creation back to himself in order that a new heaven may appear on a new earth.<sup>24</sup>

The theme "Your Kingdom come" was presented as an invitation to enter into an historical struggle for the total transformation of all creation. In Christian mission we are invited to participate in the liberating movement of the Holy Spirit in the world. Our missionary obligation is to announce the kingdom of freedom and invite all to participate in the struggles for the transformation of all things in the perspective of the kingdom.

Daniel Van Allmen of Switzerland in his paper, "The Kingdom of God and Human Struggles" asked the question : If we believe in the Lordship of God, and if we hope for the coming of His kingdom, what are we to think of the struggles and conflicts in our world ? He himself answered it thus: Since the incarnation, the struggles of humankind in this world can no longer be a matter of indifference for us. For in Jesus Christ God has made common cause with humanity, and his suffering struggle for the liberation of humanity will last till the end of the world.<sup>25</sup>

In Jesus Christ, God has made a pact with humanity to liberate it from inhuman powers. The Melbourne Conference understood the coming of

the Kingdom of God as a declaration of war against all forces and structures that enslaved and exploited God's creation. Did this mean that Melbourne thought of the Kingdom only in terms of material wellbeing and as a worldly affair? This was a criticism raised against the Bangkok Conference by the Russian Orthodox Church. After the Bangkok meeting, the Russian Orthodox Church sent a letter to the World Council of Churches saying that while they recognized the importance and the duty of Christian participation in social issues, they wanted to highlight the reality of salvation as hope beyond death, as life in God. Referring to this Emilio Castro said in Melbourne:

We do not, of course, want to escape our historical responsibility. But precisely because we believe in the historical responsibility of Christians and of all human beings, and in order to find inspiration, courage and vision for the historical task, we confess our faith in a kingdom that is not limited to the horizon of our historical death. The missionary movement was committed to overcome all distances, to cross all barriers, to open all frontiers with the message of the kingdom. To die is not to be lost to the kingdom, because God in Christ has overcome even the last enemy, death itself. Those who die in the kingdom's struggle are also participants in the hope of the kingdom that is coming... How then can we make a contradiction between our entering into historical struggles and our belief in eternal life with God? It is precisely because we discover the ultimate within the struggles for the penultimate that we engage seriously in those struggles, surrendering even our lives because we know that our failures, too, can be used by God as he used the Cross of his only begotten son Jesus Christ to advance the redemption of humankind, to bring the kingdom.<sup>26</sup>

The Conference discussed four aspects of the theme, in four sections. The sectional topics were

1. "Good News to the Poor",
2. "The Kingdom of God and Human Struggles",
3. "The Church Witnesses to the Kingdom", and

#### 4. "Christ - Crucified and Risen - Challenges Human Power".<sup>27</sup>

##### ***1. Good News to the Poor***

There were three presentations on the topic in the section plenary. Raymond Fung of Hong Kong spoke of 'Good News to the poor - A Case for a Missionary Movement'. Joaquim Beato from Brazil spoke on Good News to the poor and its implications for the mission of the church in Latin America. The paper by Canaan Banana of Zimbabwe was on the connection between the struggle of liberation from poverty and the proclamation of the Good News.

Raymond Fung<sup>28</sup> argued for a missionary movement among the world's poor so that the slum dwellers, factory workers, street laborers, farm hands, and their families could be confronted with the claims of Jesus. By the missionary movement he meant evangelizing and witnessing communities of the poor which will discover and live their expression of faith among the masses of the poor and the oppressed. He pointed out that a person is not only a sinner but is also the sinned against. A person is lost not only in the sins of his own heart but also in the sinning grasp of principalities and powers of the world, demonic forces which cast a bondage over human lives and human institutions and infiltrate their very textures. A person persistently deprived of basic material needs and political rights is also a person deprived of much of his or her soul - self respect, dignity and will. The destroyer of the body may not be able to kill the soul, but it can, and too often does, rape and maim the soul. Hence Fung urged that the Gospel should not only call on the people to repent of their sins, but must also call on them to resist the forces that sin against them. The Gospel empowers the poor for such struggles.

Joaquim Beato spoke of the missionary task of the Protestant churches in Latin America. He pointed out that there are two traditions in the literature of Israel in the Old Testament: one derived from the pact of Moses, and the other from the pact of David. The Mosaic pact is characterized by a protest movement of the disinherited, and its theological vision is articulated around a God who Intervenes decisively in favor of the enslaved and oppressed and against the oppressive structures that are apparently unshakeable. On the other hand, a Davidic tradition is characterized by a movement of the established groups, and its theological perspective is articulated around a God who depends and sustains the *status quo*. "A reading of the Old Testament materials of the various periods of the history of Israel, in the light of the contrasts

between these perspectives, shows that this tension existed throughout the centuries covered by the canonic literature as the two "trajectories" in the reading of history where the existence and vocation of the people of God is made explicit".<sup>29</sup>

Beato mentioned that Gerd Theissen, in his sociological analysis of primitive Christianity, had reached the conclusion that there is continuity between Jesus and his first followers and the Mosaic liberation tradition. The tradition of Jesus' teachings are characterized by an ethical radicalism that requires leaving home, i.e. to forsake permanent residence, the family, goods and properties. According to Theissen, such teachings can only be practiced in extreme situations. Only outside the establishment can such an ethos be lived. The early Christian missionaries moved from place to place and were subject to hunger and persecution. "If and when they found food and lodging it was from people who, like themselves, were outside the establishment. The attention of the religious and social pariahs, the prostitutes, the publicans, received in Jesus' ministry is clear evidence that those who transmitted the word belonged to the lower ranks of society. In the synoptic literature we see the world from below".<sup>30</sup>

Beato pointed out that the Christian affirmation of the poor as the bearers and the object of the Gospel was not simply a theological thesis, but was also the result of an objective historical and sociological reading of the roots of Christianity. "It characterizes the option between two different "trajectories" that are present in the history of the people of God, and it is in this history that it affirms and makes explicit the meaning of its vocation in the world".<sup>31</sup> Latin America is a continent where the state is very oppressive and the economy is controlled by transnational companies with the result that economic benefits are concentrated in the hands of a small community. In such a situation, Beato pointed out, evangelization that does not make a preferential option for the poor will have no future. The Roman Catholic Church in Latin America had already made a preferential option for the poor and the Protestants needed to do the same.

Canaan Banana, in his paper, discussed who the poor were, and why. He defined the poor as the little ones, powerless, voiceless and at the mercy of the powerful. The methods of keeping the poor perpetually in their place were the oppressive social, political and economic structures. The dynamics of being poor are such that the oppressed poor finally accept the inhumanity and the humiliation of their situation; they accept the

status quo as the normal course of life. "Thus, to be poor becomes both a state of things and an attitude of life, an outlook, even a world view. The vicious circle is completed when the oppressor, in turn, internalizes an attitude of permanent supremacy and paternalism towards the poor, and undertakes to speak, think and act for the poor. The poor are thus made dependent and made to feel dependent on the rich".<sup>32</sup>

Yet, as the speaker pointed out, the surprising thing about the poor is that no matter how serious their dehumanization is, there remains an indestructible element within their personality. There is an inner kernel, linked perhaps with the image of God in human being, which is very difficult, if not impossible, to crack. There is the capability to still be human. The recognition of this capacity is at the center of the Good News. The poor need not remain poor, lying in the dust, being trampled under the feet of the oppressor. God calls the poor up and out from his sad plight. He has the capacity to stand on his own feet. Coupled with the capacity to be human in dehumanization, and to be noble in indignity, is the poor's inherent capacity to fight for their own liberation and to think for themselves.

Wherever Good News has been proclaimed, restoration of the dignity and personality of man must be clearly evident; restoration to wholeness, to humanness. This is healing in the true sense of the word. It signals the banishment of anxiety and insecurity. In a nutshell, Good News is that which humanizes the whole of life all of the time.<sup>33</sup>

Canaan Banana asked, "Is it possible to achieve total liberation of the whole person, of the whole society without recourse to theological or religious resources? Can man transcend himself and his limitations by drawing upon his internal capacities alone, without reference to the reality that is greater, outside of and beyond himself?" It is here, he says, that the Gospel comes to our aid. Jesus the man addresses all liberation movements from the vantage point of an accomplished liberated liberator. Jesus was internally liberated. That is why he could liberate others. The liberators of humankind must be integrated and liberated within their own personalities. On the cross Christ identified himself with the poor, the oppressed and the captives of all times. Only the poor, can understand the full meaning of the death of Christ. He saved them by giving them the certainty of future fulfillment when they are engaged in their struggle against the oppressor. Liberation became

possible when somebody much stronger than the powers of the world overcame death through the power of the resurrection. Good News to the poor is a celebration and enactment of the classic and normative liberation struggle in which Jesus defeated all human and spiritual forces of oppression.<sup>34</sup>

The section report stated clearly that in the perspective of the Kingdom, God has preference for the poor. God has shown preference for the poor throughout the history of Israel. At the beginning of his ministry, Jesus announced, "The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach the Good News to the poor". In Jesus, God has identified with the poor. However, the Good News is not only for the poor. The poor are blessed because of their longing for justice and their hope for liberation. They accept the promise that God has come to their rescue. It is a profound assurance that God is with them and for them. At the same time the coming of the Kingdom is a judgement on the rich, calling them to repent and trust in God.

The judgement of God thus comes as a verdict in favor of the poor. This verdict enables the poor to struggle to overthrow the powers that bind them, which will then release the rich from the necessity to dominate. Once this has happened it is possible for the humbled rich and the poor to become human and capable of response to the challenge of the kingdom?<sup>35</sup>

The report stated that God intends all people to have the necessities of life and to enjoy a permanent or social state of wellbeing. This is what the Lord meant when he said, "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly".<sup>36</sup>

As to the mission of the church, the report stated that the church was called to announce the Good News to the poor. Mission that is conscious of the kingdom will be concerned for liberation, not oppression; justice, not exploitation; fullness, not deprivation; freedom, not slavery; health, not disease; life, not death. The report pointed out that all over the world the churches were part of the establishment assisting in the maintenance of the *status quo* that exploited not only the nations and nature, but the poor in their own country. The churches were alienated from the poor by their middle class values. The report called on the churches to examine their lifestyle and urged them to become churches in solidarity with the struggles of the poor, joining the struggle against the powers of

exploitation and impoverishment, establishing a new relationship with the poor within the churches, praying and working for the Kingdom of God.

At the Conference there was uncertainty as to the definition of the poor - materially poor or spiritually poor. But the Conference made a deliberate choice. It recognized the fact that the frontier to be crossed today is not primarily to be defined in religious terms but in material terms. As Matthey stated, "In the world perspective and within many countries of the world, the mission under the Kingdom of God cannot be faithful today if it is not formulated as Good News to the materially poor".<sup>37</sup>

A major emphasis by the Melbourne gathering was on the Kingdom of God as Good News to the poor. What Melbourne did, according to Emilio Castro, was to affirm the poor as the missiological principle par excellence. The relation to the poor inside the church, outside the church, nearby and far away, is the criterion to judge the authenticity and credibility of the church's missionary engagement.<sup>38</sup> In this affirmation, the Conference had been greatly influenced by Latin American Liberation Theology, especially the pronouncement of the Roman Catholic Bishops' Conference in Pueblo (Mexico), on the preferential option for the poor.

## ***2. The Kingdom of God and Human Struggles***

Daniel Von Allmen of Switzerland began his paper on "The Kingdom of God and Human Struggles" by saying that conflict seemed to be a permanent truth about human life. In many parts of the world, human beings were struggling not for an improvement in their conditions of life or for any social progress, but purely and simply for life itself. They were deprived of their basic rights to sufficient and appropriate nourishment, clothing and housing, and often of their right to love, to warmth and to a human environment in which they could grow and develop as persons. Since the incarnation, Von Allmen said, the struggles of humankind in this world could no longer be a matter of indifference for the Christians.

Speaking of justice, he said that the struggle for justice was too often limited to one's own rights. Any genuine struggle for justice could only begin at the point where such limits are called into question and where the rights of one are seen also as being valid for the other. For example,

he said, "We have sent missionaries into all the world because we believed that the gospel we have received is also good for humanity beyond all frontiers. Will we now - and I am speaking as a man from the West - passionately defend the frontiers when it is a question of a better sharing of the riches of creation throughout the world! Will we claim that the struggles for a more just international economic order has nothing to do with mission".<sup>39</sup> He then made an important observation. He pointed out that in the face of the coming kingdom, all the realities of human history became relative, indeed downgraded. Even at its best, human struggles in this world have no more than penultimate status. Yet if it is true, must we not necessarily draw the conclusion that we all, Christians and non-Christians alike, have been made equal? For even the historical reality of the Church at its highest and best has no more than penultimate status. We are all in the same boat.<sup>40</sup>

What Von Allmen said was that human struggles need to be seen in their international context, and that in those struggles, all human beings were basically in a common solidarity - Christian and non-Christian. In the perspective of the kingdom, he also stressed the penultimate status of all our efforts.

Von Allmen mentioned that one of the serious struggles in which human beings were engaged was the struggle for truth. "Are we in this case, too, in the same boat with the rest of humanity? Many people will dispute that, for in comparison to all other faiths is our faith not the true faith?" Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life." This, according to Von Allmen, means that the truth is a living person, one who cannot be taken captive by words. "But as soon as I try to express this truth with my words it is inextricably caught up in the weakness of all human activity, loses all absoluteness and can only be treated as human. Until the Kingdom of God has fully arrived, until we see God face to face, our awareness of truth can at best be partial (1. Cor. 13:12)"<sup>41</sup>. Then he said:

Every pronouncement about our faith results not only from a struggle with the stubbornness of our inability to express the truth, but also from a struggle with God and with the truth which is always running ahead of us. Seen in this way we are on the same footing with all those who sincerely struggle for truth. This struggle for truth takes place in dialogue... For me this means that dialogue is a basic structure of Christian witness, and therefore quite naturally of all missionary witness, while we remain on

the earthly pilgrimage.<sup>42</sup>

These questions and observations of Von Allmen did not receive adequate attention at the Conference.

The section report begins by saying that there were many struggles in many places. In view of the ambiguity of what was going on in the struggles, the task of the Christian churches was to say "yes" to that which conformed to the Kingdom of God, as revealed to humankind in the life of Jesus Christ, and to say "no" to that which distorted the dignity and freedom of human beings and all that is alive. The churches were called to live in the midst of human struggles and to be present at the bleeding points of humanity, thus being near those who suffered evil, and taking the risk of being counted among the wicked. Without losing sight of the ultimate hope of the Kingdom of God, or giving up their critical attitude, the churches had to dare to be present in the midst of human struggles for penultimate solutions. Above all the churches should witness to the hope for humankind and for the whole creation in the life, death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The report deals with the subject: The Kingdom of God and Human Struggles, under five areas of concern: The Kingdom of God and the struggles of people in countries searching for liberation and self-determination; The Kingdom of God and the struggles for human rights; The Kingdom of God in contexts of strong revival of institutional religions; The Kingdom of God in the context of centrally planned economics; and The Kingdom of God in the struggles of countries dominated by consumerism and the growth of big cities.

Speaking of evangelism and mission in the struggle for human rights, the report states:

When the churches and individual members of the churches get involved in the struggles for human rights they do so because they have seen in Jesus Christ as Lord of the kingdom of God a radical challenge of all attempts at depriving women and men of their human rights. Churches and Christians are called to participate in such struggles as those who witness in their obedience to the unique character of the Gospel's demand for love towards the enemy, forgiveness and reconciliation. Evangelism is part of the local mission of the church in the social,

economic and political life of the human societies. Thus such participation in struggles for human rights is in itself a central element in the total mission of the church to proclaim by word and act the crucified and risen Christ.<sup>43</sup>

The report reminded the churches:

There is a need for the churches to change their own attitudes and styles of life and let themselves be renewed by the Gospel which is entrusted to them, that they may serve humankind with a true interpretation of what is going on in the many struggles, pointing to Jesus Christ as the one in whom God sums up all things?<sup>44</sup>

### ***3. The Church Witnesses to the Kingdom***

John V. Taylor from Great Britain spoke on the subject in the plenary session.<sup>45</sup> He said that the Kingdom of God did not lie within the span of world history; it belonged to another dimension. Yet it was so near at hand that it throws its light ahead of its arrival, and those who responded to its promise and invitation lived in the light. Jesus called men to live the life of the Kingdom in anticipation of its arrival. The sick did not have to wait for the consummation of the Kingdom before God's victory over disease could be manifested in them. "If I by the finger of God drive out the demons, know for sure that the Kingdom of God has already come upon you". So neither should those who have responded, to the announcement of the Kingdom's arrival wait any longer before beginning to live its life.

Jesus saw himself as the one in whom the Kingdom was already being realized. His task was not simply to announce its arrival but to actually inaugurate it. The church was called into being in order to live the life of the Kingdom in anticipation of its arrival. The church should be shaped by its certainty about the future that God provides. That certainty throws its light upon everything in the present. The future, in which everything will find fulfillment with the will and nature of God, is already pressing itself into the present world order to question and to change it. The Kingdom arrives from beyond, yet it is of this world. It is the Father's will and Father's rule on earth as in heaven. Therefore what the church offers mankind is an alternative life view and an alternative life style.

With regard to the witness of the church, John Taylor made it very clear that there could be no witness to the Kingdom without the cross and resurrection. Very early in His ministry Jesus had come to terms with the resistance and hardness of heart with which His preaching was met. People in power, people supported by tradition, and those who were insecure and envious, were not going to be changed easily. Jesus came to see that the Kingdom was going to be inaugurated through His suffering and death. This is indicated by the choice of the title "Son of Man" for Himself. In the vision of Daniel, the Son of Man represents not a single individual but God's royal people. "The Son of Man, therefore, means the agent and inaugurator of the coming kingdom who will enable others to share with him his special relationship with God through a voluntary acceptance of death".<sup>46</sup> Whenever we think about the church, John Taylor suggests, we must never forget that when Jesus chose the title "Son of Man" He was using a figure with a plural meaning. He called others to be with Him not just in living the life of the Kingdom, but also in dying the necessary death for the Kingdom. The twelve were selected by Jesus as representatives of the tribes of Israel in order to constitute the faithful remnant in its final manifestation as the dying and suffering servant. At the end, the twelve failed Him and He had to go alone to the cross. But the Apostolic Church realized that the invitation to share this with Him was renewed by the Risen Christ. This became for them the main significance of baptism. "If we have become incorporate with him in a death like this, we shall also be with him in a resurrection like this".<sup>47</sup> And this sharing of the broken bread and the poured-out wine was the symbol He gave them to show that they were still included in His own vocation to be the Son of Man. The koinonia of the church is nothing less than the cost of literally partaking in the sufferings and the resurrection of Christ in order to make up the balance of what has still to be endured in order to unlock the Kingdom for others to enter in (2. Cor. 1:7; 1. Peter 4:13; Col. 1:24). The church which shares with Jesus being the Son of Man has to expose itself to the same humiliation and derision. Those who are called to live the life of the Kingdom in anticipation of its arrival commit themselves to the pattern of the cross and resurrection. If we live by another pattern we are not preaching the Gospel Jesus preached. This pattern of life opposes absolutely the way of the world.<sup>48</sup>

John Taylor pointed out that the context of the church's witness was the local human situation:

It is in this world that the life-style of the kingdom has to

be lived in anticipation of its arrival. The life-style cannot be lived in a religious enclave constructed to provide favorable conditions. Christians live the life of the Kingdom not as members of a sect, but as parents and neighbors, as workers, as citizens, as people of a particular race, as members of privileged or deprived groups. Witnessing to the Kingdom means enabling people in each particular situation to see the nature of God truly reflected in the mirror of their own culture, their own institutions and their own conflicts.<sup>49</sup>

It was in this context that John Taylor saw the importance of the local church. The belief in the Kingdom of God should give shape and direction to the five essential activities of the Church, which must also be the activities of every local Church - worship, fellowship, learning, service and witness. These are all part of the witness which the Church bears to the coming Kingdom. Though worship and fellowship, the learning and serving are all part of the witness which the Church bears to the coming Kingdom, we witness supremely by living the life and telling the story.

The Bible makes it clear that the people of God are his witnesses in two senses. Like someone in the witness box, they are called to say what they have seen and heard and experienced. But they are also, in themselves, by the lives they lead, the exhibits which the counsel for the defense will produce as evidence before the eyes of the court. What we are, as well as what we say, speaks either for the God of Jesus Christ or against him. The aim of all Christian witness is to persuade people whose minds are not yet made up to decide for God, to believe and trust in the God whom Jesus knew as his Father, and to experience the reality of that God for themselves.<sup>50</sup>

The story of God in Christ is the essential kernel which lies at the heart of all evangelism and at the center of every activity of mission. A major problem is to tell the story in such a way that people hear it as contemporary and relevant.<sup>51</sup> John Taylor pointed out that we could reach outsiders not by anything we do inside the church buildings but by crossing over to the outsiders and learning to be at home in that alien territory, as the more we are engaged in Christian witness, the more we shall recognize that it is not we who make or mar the future. "The

kingdom is being given to us. The penultimate reality in which we live and struggle is not the road by which we reach the ultimate. It is the other way round. The ultimate which lies beyond our sight is shaping the penultimate in which we live, through the power of faith, hope and love".<sup>52</sup>

The section report on "The Church Witnesses to the Kingdom" began by saying that the title was a frightening claim but a powerful reality. It was frightening because our personal experience of the empirical church is that often church life has hidden rather than revealed the sovereignty of God. Yet there is reality here. "The whole church of God, in every place and time, is a sacrament of the kingdom which came in the person of Jesus Christ and will come in its fullness when he returns in glory".<sup>53</sup> The report dealt with the subject under five points: Proclamation of the word of God; In search of a living community at the local level; The healing community; Common witness to God's kingdom; The Eucharist as a witness to the Kingdom of God and an experience of God's reign.

The proclamation of the Good News is the announcement that the Kingdom of God is at hand, a challenge to repent and an invitation to believe, the report said. By Jesus, and in His name, the powers of the Kingdom bring liberation and wholeness, dignity and life both to those who hunger after justice, and to those who struggle with consumerism, greed, selfishness and death. The proclamation is the responsibility of the whole church and of every member, although the Spirit endows some members with special gifts to be evangelists, and a great diversity of witness is found. The credibility of the proclamation rests upon the authenticity of the total witness of the church. Authentic proclamation will be a spontaneous output of a church which is truly a worshipping community, welcoming outsiders, offering their service in both church and society and being a pilgrim community that makes its proclamation along the way. On this pilgrimage, proclamation is always linked to a specific situation and a specific moment in history. One specific area of concern at the moment is the widespread oppression of women in both the church and society.<sup>54</sup>

The report called the churches to search for an authentic community in Christ at the local level, which would encompass, but be larger than, the local church community (because the kingdom is wider than the church). The Kingdom of God is an inclusive and open reality, seeking to include people irrespective of their sex, race, age and color; willing to reflect on and respond to needs and ideas beyond the Christian

community and thus entering into dialogue and service with all. The hopes and aspirations of the surrounding community are to be taken up in the life of the witness to the Kingdom. Its life being a foretaste of the Kingdom, the Church has to confront the values, structures, ideologies and practices of the society of which it is a part. The report recognizes the fact that there is disparity between the Kingdom and the actual condition of our empirical local congregations. Yet, as the report points out, the institutional church is not to be rejected as it is one of the forms in which renewal can occur. The report recommended various forms of community life which would bring about renewal in life and mission such as 'Base' Christian communities, House churches, Prayer groups, Monastic communities and other groups seeking a simpler life-style or seeking involvement in various kinds of mission.

Jesus Christ healed the sick as a sign that the Kingdom of God had come. It was a healing of the whole person - forgiveness for the guilt-laden, health for the diseased, hope for the despairing, restored relations for the alienated. The report says:

The churches in this response must commit themselves in fellowship with those who struggle to rid the world of these root causes. In their healing work they need to give priority to the poor, the aged, the refugees and the chronically ill who are particularly disadvantaged in health care. It is not only that poor countries lack basic medical services. It is also that the medical profession's concentration on spectacular achievement, expensive specialist treatment, and great hospitals diverts attention from basic health care for all.<sup>55</sup>

The report affirmed the need for common witness to the Kingdom and called for common witness in many areas of church's mission such as socio-political contexts, Bible translation and distribution, developing theological training for clergy and laity ecumenically, and so on. It pointed out that common witness was especially important in pluralistic societies. The churches could best contribute by joint efforts to promote the expression of Christian values in public affairs and in life styles. "Common witness implies respect for varying cultural heritages and the avoidance of even the more subtle and hidden forms of cultural invasion". With regard to the damage done for Christian witness by Christian divisions, the report says: "We believe that unless the pilgrimage route leads the churches to visible unity, in the one God we

preach and worship, the one Christ crucified for us all, the one Holy Spirit who creates anew, and the one Kingdom, the mission entrusted to us in this world will always be rightly questioned".<sup>56</sup>

The Eucharist is a witness to the Kingdom of God and an experience of God's reign. The sharing of the broken bread and the poured-out wine was the symbol Jesus gave to the disciples to show that they were still included in His vocation to be the 'Son of Man'. On the very night of His betrayal when the agony and distress were powerful, He offered this food that the disciples might know their unity with Him. We are in a world where agony multiplies, and where there are no easy roads to peace. "On this betrayal night Jesus still invites us to share bread and wine that we may be one with Him in sacrificial love".<sup>57</sup> Communion with God in Christ and community with God's people are two aspects of the one sacrament. The Eucharist calls us to be united with God and united with one another. It is a sacrament of unity. It is also Pilgrim Bread. There are times and places where the very act of coming together to celebrate the Eucharist can be a public witness. Yet the experience of the Eucharist is primarily within the fellowship of the church. It gives life to the Christians so that they may be formed in the Image of Christ and so become effective witnesses to Him. "As we receive the Eucharist, Gods' all for us, are we giving our all to him and his needy children".<sup>58</sup>

#### ***4. The Crucified Christ Challenges Human Power***

In the section plenary, Kosuka Koyama of Japan spoke on the subject: The Crucified Christ Challenges Human Power. In his address, he asked the questions: Who is Jesus Christ and What does the Crucified Christ mean? He pointed out that the church believed that Jesus Christ was the center of all peoples and all things. But he is the center who is always in motion towards the periphery. In this he reveals the mind of God who is concerned about the people on the periphery. Jesus was the center person laid in a manger "because there was no place for him in the inn". He affirmed his centrality by giving it up. He died outside the city gate. That is what the designation 'crucified' means. Koyama said:

His life moves towards the periphery. He expresses his centrality in the periphery by reaching the extreme periphery. Finally on the cross, he stops this movement. Then he cannot move. He is nailed down. This is the point of ultimate periphery. "My God, my God, why hast thou

forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34). He is the crucified Lord. "Though he was in the form of God, he did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself" (Phil. 2:6-7). From this utmost point of periphery he establishes his authority. This movement towards the periphery is called the love of God in Christ. In the periphery his authority and love meet. They are one. His authority is substantiated by love. His love is authoritative.<sup>59</sup>

The Crucified Christ challenges human power, Koyama continued. As the periphery man He challenged the idolatry in religion and politics and confirmed the deeper tradition of "God, be merciful to me, a sinner" in the life of the synagogue and the church. "When these words are said by someone, whether he or she, rich or poor, they can challenge the existing unjust social order, because such souls are free from idolatry. They do not try to be peaceful when there is no peace. They are 'broken, souls' (Psalms 51:17). The broken souls can become community-minded souls. They are equipped with keen perception on the whereabouts and works of social justice ... These words of the tax collector can challenge human religious and political power. The authority-free dynamism of periphery is at work in these words. They point to the authority of Jesus"<sup>60</sup>

With regard to the church, Koyama said that the church was a strange institution created by the Crucified Lord. It is this image of the Crucified Lord that must come out through the life of the institutional church. It is the life that accepts humiliation in order to save others from humiliation. The crucified Christ cannot be easily institutionalized. He cannot be tamed. He is always able to crucify the institution built in His name. He visits his church as the Crucified Lord. He asks His church to have a crucified mind rather than a crusading mind.

In our world today, "good Christian people" are those who distance themselves from the suffering of the world. They talk about the suffering and give some charity. But their goodness is that of the bystanders. Millions of times the prayer "Your Kingdom come" said by those good people who live in 'cruel innocence'. Koyama ended his address with the following observation:

This prayer, "Your Kingdom come", does not originate in the Christian Church. The Church inherited it from Israel.

The Jews prayed, "Your Kingdom come". They prayed this prayer through the catastrophe of the holocaust in recent history. It was not a cheap prayer. Today when we pray this prayer we must know that we are saying it after Auschwitz and the Cambodian genocide. The world is replete with hideous lethal weapons. It is in this world that we pray this prayer. We must know the tragic brokenness of the world when we say this prayer. With the scars of Jesus that heal the wounds of the world, we say, "Your Kingdom come".<sup>61</sup>

The section report spoke of a world which had been created as essentially good, now under the grip of demonic powers causing untold sufferings for people. The reality of the demonic powers is seen in the death of Jesus Christ where the religious, political and military powers together conspired to put Him to death. However, in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ something radically new happened which can be described as a new creation. An altogether new quality of power appeared to be let loose among humankind. It is the power of self-emptying love. It is the power of the kingdom, and of the Gospel. The believers in Christ also share in this new power with which they can fight demonic powers. The proclamation of the reign of God is the announcement of a new order which challenges the powers and structures that have become demonic.

There are different situations in which the churches are called to challenge demonic powers. The criterion for determining the relationship to the powers is the extent to which God's creative, liberating and serving power is evidenced in their actions, and the extent to which equality is established. The churches must avoid imitating the patterns of the powers that they seek to challenge. In the light of the reign of God, the fundamental criterion for the church's use of power must be the good of the poor and their liberation from oppression. The church itself is often guilty of using a measure of power. We need to ask if the church uses power for self-aggrandizement and self-preservation of the community, institution or leaders, or whether it is essentially selfless? The church structures often help in the concentration of power in the hands of the few. The report pointed out that in the church, power is exercised as an expression of selfless love and is used to build up the body of Christ. "Power which reflects the power of Christ is a power that is exercised within the community of sharing, built on communion with the Triune God. It is a power that is shared, as life within the

community is shared".<sup>62</sup> We need to ask whether all people, as children of God, participate in the agencies of power or whether there are groups that are excluded on the basis of, for example, sex, age, handicaps, economic circumstances, social marginalization. It should be noted that we have to think not only of sharing decisions, but also of the exercise in common of all the gifts given within a community such as, for example, healing, teaching, organizing, and caring. The report notes:

Any use of power that suppresses the loving exercise of gifts is an abuse that ultimately leads to the dehumanizing of persons. The clericalization of the church and the resultant withdrawal of power from the laity is a blatant expression of the abuse of power. This problem is heightened by the fact that when church structures place power in the hands of a few or even one person, a pyramidal system is created with the inherent danger of the monopolization of that power.<sup>63</sup>

There was no unanimity at the conference with regard to the ordination of women and the pyramidal pattern of the structure of some churches. As to the place of women, the report says, "It would seem to many of us that biblically, theologically and pastorally there is no reason why women should be excluded from any position in the churches. Those who affirm this feel bound to urge upon those churches which exclude the full participation of women in top leadership that ways be sought in which women can be increasingly involved in positions of full responsibility".<sup>64</sup>

The report recognized the power of money in the life of the Christian community. "Money must be considered as a tool of common sharing. The economically poor have a right to play an equal part in the common sharing of the resources of the earth. Church money should be used to support the struggle of the poor to end the unjust society". The report called for the re-structuring of the church for mission. The Crucified Christ not only challenges the structures of society, but also that of the institutional church. It said:

Churches are tempted to be self-centered and self-preserving, but are called to be serving and sharing. Churches are tempted to be self-perpetuating, but are called to be totally committed to the promises and demands of the Kingdom of God. Churches which are

tempted to be clerical and male dominated are called to be living communities in which all members can exercise their gifts and share the responsibilities ... Churches are tempted to be exclusionist and privileged but are called to be servants of a Lord who is the crucified Christ who claimed no privilege for himself but suffered for all. Churches tend to reflect and reinforce the dominating, exploiting structures of society but are called to be bodies which are critical of the status quo. Churches are tempted to a partial obedience but are called to a total commitment to the Christ who, before he was raised, had first to be crucified. <sup>65</sup>

The report called for a change in the direction of mission, arising from our understanding of Christ as the center but who is always in movement towards the periphery.

Our study and prayer together on the theme "Christ-crucified and risen-challenges human power" has led us to see special significance in the role of the poor, the powerless and the oppressed. Might it not be that they have the clearest vision, the closest fellowship with the crucified Christ who suffers in them and with them? Might it not be that the poor and powerless have the most significant word for the rich and the powerful: that Jesus must be sought on the periphery, and followed 'outside the city'? That following him involves a commitment to the poor? Who but the church of the poor can preach with integrity to the poor of the world? In these ways we see the "poor" churches of the world as the bearers of mission: world mission and evangelism may now be primarily in their hands. Perhaps they alone can waken the world to an awareness of the urgent call of Christ to costly and radical response. <sup>66</sup>

In many ways the Melbourne Conference was a great success. It was a well-prepared Conference. Its choice of the theme, "Your Kingdom Come" was a missionary theme par excellence. The Kingdom of God is not only the goal of mission but also the reason for mission. It is also the message of the Christian mission. Melbourne unambiguously affirmed that the Kingdom of God had come in the person of Jesus Christ. As Christ's Kingdom, the royal reign of God begins on earth as the

Kingdom of the Crucified, which places His disciples with Him under the cross. Melbourne, under the influence of Latin American Liberation Theology and the Conference of Roman Catholic Bishops (Medellin in 1968) and Puebla in 1979), rightly stated that God had a preferential option for the poor, and the principle or yardstick to judge the authenticity and credibility of the church's missionary engagement was the relationship of the church to the poor.

Since 1938 the missionary movement had been slowly moving away from a church-centric view of mission. But Melbourne brought the church back into discussion. The church was recognized as an agent of mission and the sacrament of the Kingdom. Melbourne made it clear that the church was only penultimate, and not absolute, and was under the judgement of the Kingdom. The Conference saw the demonic powers operating not only in the world but also in the church. It called for radical transformation of not only society but also of the churches. Speaking of Melbourne, James A. Scherer observes:

Beginning at Nairobi, and continuing at Melbourne, the church appears to have been rehabilitated in WCC circles as an instrument for mission. The spoken word - like Baptism and Eucharist - is said to have a sacramental quality; the church itself is called a sacrament of the kingdom. Melbourne clearly articulated the belief that the Christian community in its various forms is capable of repenting, being renewed, and being equipped for missionary service. In the eschatological perspective of the kingdom, the church attains its rightful place as servant and herald of the kingdom, not its final expression. liberated from feverish concern for institutional self-preservation, the church is free to give itself up its proper service of proclaiming Christ and heralding the kingdom by word and deed... Its real power lies in its faithfulness to the kenotic life-style, and to the cross and the resurrection. In giving up its life for Christ's sake, the church finds its true identity, and becomes a church in mission.<sup>67</sup>

Notwithstanding all the good work that was done at the Conference, it was narrowly focussed and failed to address some of the central issues related to the Kingdom of God. For example, some of the important questions raised by Daniel Von Allmen were not given proper

consideration. Philip Potter had pointed out that one of the key issues raised by the theme was the relationship between the Kingdom of God and the kingdoms of the world. This did not secure any attention at Melbourne. The question was not simply that the world and world history provides the context for Christian mission but whether the world has a mission to the church.

Is mission only from the church to the world or is there also a mission from the world to the church? Does God use the secular movements, other religions and cultures to educate and reform the church? In an article entitled, "The Ecumenical Movement Inside Out",<sup>68</sup> written as a preparatory paper for Melbourne, C. S. Song, one of the Asian theologians, points out that the notion of the kingdom used in a mission conference, if one is not careful, will make the story of salvation solely a Christian story. We may get away with it in so far as poverty, oppression, and injustice are concerned, but we will hardly find room for those faiths, cultures and ideologies outside the sacred tradition of the church. The issue of mission is the issue of human spirit. It is the struggle which takes place as the human spirit is invaded by the divine spirit. He says that liberation has been a great ecumenical catchword in the second half of the twentieth century, and rightly so. We all set out to liberate others - the poor, the oppressed and the exploited.

But there is another kind of liberation. This is liberation from ourselves, from our professional arrogance, from our institutional rigidity, in short, from our history. This is a liberation of a deeply spiritual kind. And since we are slow to liberate ourselves, the world has come to liberate us from our history. Secularization has done a lot towards the liberation of Christianity. It has invaded our inner sanctuary and forced us to face the reality of the world. Anti-colonial struggles too have contributed to our liberation. But this kind of liberation has yet to touch the very core of the Christian heart. When we see liberation forces advance towards the very citadel of our faith and challenge the fortress of our mission, we become defensive. We find the intruders of other faiths and ideologies a nuisance.

Speaking of the Melbourne Conference, C.S.Song said that it would mobilize everything in its power to claim the world as its mission field, and in all likelihood, come up with a well balanced manifesto on the missionary task of the church. He then posed the following question: "What will it do with the signs of Ishmael, a handmaid's child cast away to make room for Isaac, the heir, the desert kingdom of Esau who had

his birthright cheated away by the cunning Jacob, or the mission of Cyrus, the pagan king summoned by God to carry out his word which made it possible for Israel to go free?". The history we hear outside our sacred history, is the history of faith, mission and hope. He said:

At this juncture in human history, the crucial issue is perhaps not the world mission of the church, rather the mission of the world in fulfillment of the purpose of God's creation and redemption. Let us not forget the world has also a mission and the Christian church has to find the place of her mission in the mission of the world. From the world mission to the mission of the world - this transition is, to my mind, the test of whether the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism can turn itself inside out in the service of God's mission.<sup>69</sup>

The church and the world are signs one to the other. It was this perspective of the Kingdom that was missed in Melbourne. In Melbourne, the consideration of other faiths and the people of other faiths, was no more than an agenda for further discussion.<sup>70</sup>

### **San Antonio 1989**

The Commission on World Mission and Evangelism of the World Council of Churches held its next world mission conference in January 1989 at San Antonio, USA. Like the Melbourne Conference, the San Antonio Conference pursued the Kingdom theme under a phrase from the Lord's prayer, the theme being : Your Will be Done: Mission in Christ's Way.<sup>71</sup>

The Conference made it clear that in the prayer, "Thy will be done" we proclaim quietly but resolutely that above all human wills there is one will that is redemptive, life-giving, full of wisdom and power which in the end will prevail. There is a firm certainty that at the center of reality is God and His Kingdom.<sup>72</sup> In this prayer we speak to God about His will and ours. To try to transform the world in the direction of the Kingdom of God is a task far beyond our human strength, but it is a task in which we are not alone, a task in which God Himself is engaged. In his address, Anastasios of Androussa, Moderator of Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME), said that in this prayer we beseech the Father to bring to completion His plan for the salvation of the whole world, while, at the same time, seeking His grace so that we

may be freed from our own will and accept His will with joy. And not only we as individuals, but that all humankind may have fellowship in His will and share in the fulfillment. He quoted St. Chrysostom saying that Jesus did not say that thy will be done in me or us, but everywhere on earth so that the error might be done away with and truth established, all evil be cast out. "The prayer is for the celestification of the earth, that all persons and all things may become heaven".<sup>73</sup>

Emilio Castro, the General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, brought to the attention of the Conference the tremendous risk we run in speaking about the will of God. He said:

If we look at our own history, we have inquisition and counter-inquisition to remind us that the claim to know and execute God's will has very often turned out to mean serving our own end and our own will, and has been used to justify crimes of all kinds against our neighbors.<sup>74</sup>

According to Emilio Castro, we can only guard against the dangers by reminding ourselves of the penultimate nature of our existence and the provisional character of our judgements. On the one hand, we must enter into history with all the seriousness of the ultimate things. Our day to day discussions, the way we treat our neighbor are significant for our eternal destiny because in that neighbor we meet Jesus Christ, God incarnate. On the other hand, we enter into history in the knowledge that the one who comes to us in Jesus Christ is the one who, at the end of history, will come to judge the quick and the dead, to bring His purifying fire and to establish a new measure of judgement that is beyond our historically limited understanding. We cannot admit irreversible sentences in our finite history because in so doing we are usurping a final judgement that God has not entrusted to His creatures.<sup>75</sup>

The prayer, "Your will be done" constantly reminds us of a different objective reality and of our own subjectivity. In practice, we can guard against misconceptions of God's will through ecumenical dialogue, not only with other Christians, but also with other cultures and religions. The ecumenical dialogue might prevent us from falling into sectarian fanaticism. Any claim to absolute validity for our convictions will show that we worship not the transcendent God but our own idea or image of Him. This calls for dialogue, mutual criticism and constant re-consideration of our problems. The right to criticize, which is a fundamental expression of freedom, must be guaranteed for every one.

Emilio Castro said:

The difficulty we have in discerning God's will, the traps for us from our own arrogance and selfishness, which make us mistake our own will for God's will, can be overcome by fellowship among churches in the ecumenical movement, by witnessing dialogue with people of other philosophical and religious convictions. But above all they are checked by constant reference, on our part, to the person of Jesus Christ. This is why the second phrase of our theme is useful: Mission in Christ's way.<sup>76</sup>

The conference in San Antonio, when it spoke of doing God's will, spoke of discerning and doing God's will in Christ's way. Raymond Fung in an article on the subject published in the *International Review of Mission* pointed out that the church did not have a free hand with mission. Christ who has given us the go-ahead for mission has also given us certain parameters within which to work. Before Jesus began His public ministry, He spent forty days in the wilderness, struggling with what that ministry was going to be, and how it was to be carried out. The result was certain parameters for mission. We know that Jesus turned water into wine and that He fed thousands of people with five loaves and two fish. Yet in the wilderness He refused to turn stones into bread. He would not jump to safety from a high tower to draw the world to Himself. In order to draw the world to Himself, Jesus bowed His head only on the cross, not in front of the offerings of power and wealth. This was the characteristic of His mission.<sup>77</sup> Emilio Castro, in his address, also mentioned that as Christians, we cannot talk about the will of God in general terms in the presence of God in Jesus Christ. In our proclamation of God's will the inevitable and fundamental center is Jesus Christ. What does this mean for our mission? In the life and teaching of Jesus of Nazareth, said Emilio Castro, we find that priority is always given to the neighbor. In Jesus there is a total disregard for self. In His baptism, he places Himself in the rank of sinners so that with them He can assume the whole human condition. His priority, above all, was to the poor, the marginalized, children and those who were sick. The dynamic of mission in Christ's way must always start from the marginalized sectors of society and move upwards towards the domes of power.

According to Anastasios of Androusia, the mission in Christ's way

needs to be seen in the light of Jesus' total life in its Trinitarian connection and relationship. Jesus is sent by the Father and the Holy Spirit clears the way for Him, works with Him, accompanies Him, set the seal on His work and continues it for ever. The source and bearing of our apostolic activity resides in the promise and precept of the Risen Lord in its Trinitarian perspective: "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you... Receive the Holy Spirit ..." (John 20:21-22). In the first place Jesus Christ assumed the whole humanity. He is not only a savior of souls but of the entire human being and the whole of material-spiritual creation. This perspective demands creative dialogue with contemporary culture, with secular persons stuck in the materialism of this world. Secondly, the radically and eternally new element in the life of the Trinity is the element of love. 'The Father is love, the Son is love incarnate, and the Spirit is the inexhaustible power of love. Love is not a vague principle; it is the communion of persons. The Son reveals this communion of love. In it, He is not only the one who Invites, but is also the way by which this love can be attained. Closely bound up with love are the freedom, justice, liberation and fellowship of all humankind, truth and the harmony and fullness of human life. He reveals that the living center of all is love. He identifies Himself with the poor and overthrows all established authority and traditional purposes and values. "Concern for all the poor and those unjustly treated, without exception - independent of race or creed - is not a fashion of the ecumenical movement, but a fundamental tradition of the one church, an obligation that its genuine representatives always saw as of first importance".<sup>78</sup>

Anastasios went on to say that from the first movement of His presence in humanity, Christ made Kenosis (self-emptying) the revelation of the power of love of the triune God. The opposite of love is egoism. Christian life means continual assimilation of the mystery of the cross in the light against individual and social selfishness. The holy humility which is ready to accept the ultimate sacrifice, is the mystical power behind the Christian mission. To conform one's life to the crucified life of Christ involves the mystical power of the resurrection. On the other side, the resurrection is the glorious revelation of the mystery and power of the cross; victory over selfishness and death. "A mission that does not put at its center the cross and the resurrection, ends up as a shadow and fantasy". All people, the rich and the poor, are faced with the final question: What happens at death? The answer is, "For this is the will of the Father, that every one who sees the Son and believes in him should have eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6:40). Mission in Christ's way reveals this ultimate prospect of human life,

namely the celestification of life.

The conference at San Antonio discussed the main theme under four sub themes:

1. Turning to the Living God;
2. Participating in Suffering and Struggle;
3. The Earth is the Lord's; and
4. Towards Renewed Communities in Mission.

In its discussion of Christian mission in the perspective of the Kingdom of God, the Conference, in many ways, did not go much further than the Melbourne Conference.

By focussing on the Kingdom of God, both the Melbourne and San Antonio conferences made it clear that the Kingdom of God is the goal and purpose of Christian mission. They helped the ecumenical movement move away from a narrow view of mission, with its emphasis on church extension or adding members, to the institutional church. Melbourne and San Antonio pointed out that the Kingdom of God represents the ultimate reality of the 'world to come' and is not identical with the institutional church. They made it clear that the goal of mission is the manifestation, in this world, of the new creation in Christ. Thus, Christian mission takes the form of a declaration of war against all forces contrary to the will of God.

## ENDNOTES

1. Robin Boyd, *An Introduction to Indian Christian Theology*, Madras, CLS, 1969, pp. 159-160.

2. Johannes Verkul, "The Kingdom of God as the Goal of Mission Dei", *IRM*, vol. LXVIII, no. 270, April 1979. pp. 168f-.

3. *Your Kingdom Come*, Report on the World Conference on Mission and Evangelism, Geneva, WCC. 1980, p. 8. The 'Kingdom of God' was

prominent in the IMC thinking from its beginning. However, the different understandings of the Kingdom created tensions within the ecumenical movement. At the beginning of the 20th century, the theology of the 'social gospel' was very prominent in American thinking. It emphasized human initiatives in building up the Kingdom of God and stressed the social witness of the church for the sake of transforming the society toward the Kingdom. This ran counter to the Continental emphasis on the eschatological nature of the Kingdom and their understanding that the Kingdom is a gift of God and not a human achievement. The tension between the American emphasis on the social gospel and the continental emphasis on eschatology was seen in several of the ecumenical conferences since Edinburgh. This was seen in Jerusalem and was prominently present in the Oxford Conference of 1937. In Jerusalem, in contrast to the Continental view, William Paton, R.H. Tawney and others pointed out that because God's Kingdom is not of this world, it does not follow that this world is not part of the Kingdom..

4. Quoted in *Ibid.*, p. 8.

5. *Ibid.* p. 1.

6. *Ibid.*, pp. 74-77.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 36.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 61.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 34.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 62.

11. *Ibid.*, 63.

12. *Ibid.*, Acts. 2:36.

13. 1. Cor. 15:24.

14. Eph. 1:20-21.

15. *Your Kingdom Come*, p. 63.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 63.

17. *Ibid.*. xi.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 64.

19. *Ibid.*, pp. 64-65

20. *Ibid.*, p. 37.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 29.

22. *Ibid.*, p. xvi.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 67.

24. ?

25. *Ibid.*, p. 127

26. *Ibid.*, p. 30.

**27.** *Ibid.*, pp. 171-223.

28. *Ibid.*, pp. 83-92

29. *Ibid.*, p. 97.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 100 see also G. Theissen, "Itinerant Radicalism", in *Radical Religion*, A Quarterly Journal of Critical Opinions, vol. II, no. 2 & 3, 1975, pp. 84-93, *The First Followers of Jesus*, London, SCM Press, 1978, pp. 110-114.

31. *Ibid.*, 101.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 106.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 110.

34 *Ibid.*, p. 119.

35. *Ibid.*. p. 172.

36. *Ibid.*, p 174.

37. *Ibid.*, p. xiii.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 228

39. *Ibid.*, p. 129.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 127.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 130.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 130.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 186.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 192.

45. *Ibid.*. pp. 133-144.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 136.

47. Romans 6:5.

48. *Your Kingdom Come*, p. 137.

49. *Ibid.*, p. 138.

50. *Ibid.*, p. 143.

51. *Ibid.*, p. 143.

52. *Ibid.*, p. 144.

53. *Ibid.*, p. 192.

54. *Ibid.*, pp. 195-196.

55. *Ibid.*, p. 199.

56. *Ibid.*, p. 199.

**57.** *Ibid.*, p 204.

58. *Ibid.*, pp. 207.

59. *Ibid.*, p. 162.

60. *Ibid.*, p. 167-168.

61. *Ibid.*, p. 170.

62. *Ibid.*, p. 214.

63. *Ibid.*, p. 214.

64. *Ibid.*, p. 216.

65. *Ibid.*, p. 217.

66. *Ibid.*, p. 219.

67. James A. Scherer, *Op. cit*, p. 144.

68. IRM, no. 266, April 1978, p. 203f.

69. *Ibid.*, p. 206.

70. *Your Kingdom Come*, *Op.cit*, p. xiv.

71. IRM, October, 1989, p. 305f.

**72.** *Ibid.*, p. 316.

73. *Ibid.* ,p. 318

74. *Ibid.*, p. 330.

75 *Ibid.* ,p. 330.

76. *Ibid.*, p. 332.

77. IRM, January 1989, p. 4f.

78. IRM, October 1989, p. 320.

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# **Edinburgh to Salvador: Twentieth Century Ecumenical Missiology by T.V. Philip**

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## **Chapter 7: Mission and The World of Religions and Cultures**

The problem of the relationship between the Christian Gospel and religions and cultures has been a perennial one in the history of Christian mission. This was so because, as Richard Niebuhr mentions, "Christianity, whether defined as Church, creed or ethics or movement of thought, itself moves between the poles of Christ and culture."<sup>1</sup>

Christianity was born in the Greco-Roman worlds and within Judaism. Both these worlds played significant parts in shaping its character and influencing its history. To Greece it owed its theological formulations, to Rome its organizational and practical matters, and its religious impulses came from Judaism. As Christianity was born in Judaism, it was natural that the earliest presentation of the Christian faith was expressed in Jewish terms. It was not very long, however, before Christianity crossed the borders of Palestine to the wider area of the Greco-Roman worlds of different religions and cultures and was faced with the question of presenting the Gospel to a culturally pluralistic world and accepting the Gentiles into its fellowship.

The church was then faced with two questions. Firstly, what requirements - both moral and ritual - should be demanded of the Gentile converts? The question was about the nature of Christian

fellowship. The expansion of Christianity among the Gentiles meant that the unity of the church, which was based on the ethnic or racial homogeneity of the Palestinian fellowship of Jewish Christians, was radically questioned. This led to the Jewish-Gentile controversy.

Secondly, the mission of the church in the Gentile world raised the question of the church's attitude to pagan culture and society. While the attitude of the Christians to pagan polytheism and idol worship, in general, was absolutely negative, a creative encounter took place between Christianity on the one hand, and Greek culture and philosophy on the other. While Tatian, Tertullian, and some others took a negative attitude, Clement of Alexandria, Origen and others applied themselves to reconciling the achievements of pagan culture and philosophy with the demands of the Gospel. Logos Christology of the early church was one of the results of such efforts. It was in its encounter with Greek philosophy and culture and also with Indian and Central Asian cultures that the church began to grasp the meaning of the universality of its message.

In the Middle Ages, in the west, it was the encounter with Aristotle, through the work of Muslim scholars that led to the emergence of the great theological enterprise known as Scholasticism. Here a pagan philosophy became an effective tool in the hands of the Dominican Thomas Aquinas to build up a theological edifice, which remained as the official teaching of the Roman Catholic church for centuries. The influence of Aristotle on 13th century thinking in Europe was such that it became necessary to find a way of reconciling Christian theism with the truth of Aristotle.

All through the history of the church, church-in-missions was always faced with the question of the relationship between Gospel and culture. In the case of the modern missionary movement, the question was seriously raised in the mission fields in Africa, and especially in Asia. The coming of the Portuguese at the end of the fifteenth century marked the beginning of a period of western colonialism in Asia and also, on a large scale, of western cultural influences. Christianity, both in its Roman Catholic and Protestant forms, was part of the western cultural influences. The alliance between colonialism and the missionary movement had in many ways influenced the process and the nature of the encounter between Christianity and Asian cultures, and had served to distort the nature of the church and its witness.

The missionary attitude to Asian cultures during the colonial period was not always uniform. In the 17th century, the Jesuits in China and India took an interest in local cultural traditions and practices; so did the Danish missionary, Ziegenbalg in South India in the 18th century. But such missionaries were a minority. On the whole the missionary attitude to Asian religions and cultures was rather negative. There were several factors that brought about such a situation. In the medieval Christendom of Europe there was no room for pluralism of any sort. The missionaries who came to Asia from a church and society of this background were incapable of understanding a religiously pluralistic situation or relating meaningfully to this. Towards the end of the 18th century, Europe was passing through a period of great economic growth, social reform and evangelical revival. The social and economic changes brought about by the Industrial Revolution gave the Europeans a new pride in their religion and culture. In the case of Britain's relations with India, Britain was looked upon as an advanced and progressive civilization, while India was condemned as being barbarous and superstitious. Nineteenth century Britain was indeed a civilization on the march and the new spirit of self-assurance led to an attitude of aggressiveness in their relationship with India. James Mill in his book, *History of British India*, was unsparing in his criticism of Indian religions. According to him, the real character of Indian religion was superstition and priestly despotism. In Charles Grant's view, it was not only the inborn weakness that made the Hindu degenerate but also the nature of their religion. Not only did it fail to teach virtue but also it positively encouraged immorality. In 1813, Wilberforce, the champion of the evangelical cause in England, declared, "Our religion is sublime, pure, beneficent. Theirs (Indian) is mean, licentious and cruel".<sup>2</sup>

Alexander Duff, a Scottish Presbyterian missionary in India in the middle of the 19th century, whose ideas can be considered representative of the majority of the protestant missionaries at that time, thought that though Hinduism possessed very lofty terms in its vocabulary, what they conveyed were only vain and foolish and wicked conceptions. According to him, Hinduism spread out before us like a universe "where all life dies and death lives". The Christian task for him was to do everything possible to demolish so gigantic a fabric of idolatry and superstition.<sup>3</sup>

The ideas of James Mill, Charles Grant, Duff and others about Indian religion and society greatly influenced missionary thinking of the period. Missionaries in most of the other countries in Asia also held

similar views about the religions of those countries. Missionaries and civil servants who came to Asia with a preconceived idea of the darkness of the Asian world were not able to see anything good in Asian societies. The early protestant missionaries were children of the evangelical awakening of the 18th and early 19th centuries. They came to Asia with a gloomy pietistic theology which divided humankind into two parts: the converted and the unconverted, the saved and the lost. The main object of Christian mission was understood as saving souls of the heathen from damnation and hell. Moreover, there was for a long time, real ignorance on the part of the westerners as well as Asians, of the history and the rich traditions of Asian cultures.

The result of such negative attitudes and ignorance was conflict and controversies between Christianity and Asian religions in the mission fields. The period between 1830 and 1865 was a period of religious conflict between Christianity and Hinduism in India. Missionary publications of this period were mostly Christian apologetics and a large number of them were polemical in character. About this William Buyers, an LMS missionary wrote, "Christianity appeared in this country too much in the character of an Ishmaelite, whose hand is against every man".<sup>4</sup> Towards the end of the 19th century, however, there was in evidence a gradual change in this attitude. In this, the work of Western Oriental scholars and the rise of nationalism in Asia were important factors. The Chairs for the Study of Asian Religions and Languages were founded in the universities of the West. The rediscovery of India's past by Oriental scholars such as H.T. Colebrooke and Max Muller, and the growing pride in the Asian cultural heritage among Asian intellectuals and nationalists helped both missionaries and Asian Christians to develop positive attitudes towards Asian cultures.<sup>5</sup> This changed attitude was reflected in the discussions at the Edinburgh Conference.

## **Edinburgh, 1910**

Timothy Yates points out that in the period up to, and after, the Edinburgh Conference in 1910, mission, as expansion was a dominant understanding, not least in the Anglo-Saxon world. He says that the twentieth century may well be viewed by historians as the American century, as much as the nineteenth had been considered to be the British century. So it should be of little surprise that expansion and extension, so much a part of the American experience as the frontier moved steadily westwards, should have become the staple vision of the

Christian mission for men like J.R. Mott. Yates observes that Americans had cultural and historical reasons for viewing mission in terms of extension and expansion, whether as pioneers in an essentially hostile environment to be subdued, or as sharers in the general territorial expansionism of Christendom in the nineteenth century. It was no wonder that the leaders of the Student Volunteer Movement, the YMCA, and the World Student Christian Federation, who were also to be the leaders of the protestant missionary movement in the early twentieth century, had expansion as their chief objective.<sup>6</sup>

In 1910 in Edinburgh a World Missionary Conference was convened to discuss the evangelization of non-Christian lands. It is important to note that missionaries working in South America were not invited to Edinburgh, as South America was not deemed to be non-Christian. While all conference deliberations were concerned with evangelism, there were two Commissions in Edinburgh, which were specifically concerned with evangelism in the non-Christian world. One (Commission I) was on carrying the Gospel to all the non-Christian world, and the other (Commission IV) on missionary message in relation to non-Christian religions. The main purpose of this Commission (Commission IV) was to study the problems involved in the presentation of Christianity to the minds of non-Christian peoples.<sup>7</sup> Before the conference, extensive surveys had been conducted among the missionaries in the field and their responses were made available at the meeting of the Commission. Some of the questions included:

- What do you consider to be the chief moral, intellectual, and social hindrances in the way of a full acceptance of Christianity?
- What attitude should a Christian preacher take toward the religion of the people among whom he labours?
- What are the elements in the said religion or religions which present points of contact with Christianity and may be regarded as a preparation for it?
- Which elements in the Christian Gospel and the Christian life have you found to possess the greatest power of appeal and which have awakened the greatest opposition? <sup>8</sup>

The Edinburgh Conference was conscious of the unique opportunity and

urgency of carrying the Gospel to all the non-Christian world. The world, it said, was ready for the Gospel. For example, with regard to Japan, it pointed out, "The leaders of the nation and thoughtful men are feeling the need for a new moral basis, and many of them are looking to Christianity to furnish it."<sup>9</sup> In the case of India, the conference said that non-Christian religions are losing their hold on certain classes of people, especially the educated classes. This breaking up of old faiths and their failure to satisfy the deepest longings and highest aspirations of people imposed a serious responsibility upon the Christian church. "The danger is that, released from the restraints of their old religions, these people will give themselves entirely to irreligious and demoralizing practices";<sup>10</sup> hence the urgency for evangelism.

The Conference was very optimistic about the success of Christian mission. Not that it was unaware of the difficulties and obstacles which stood in the way of Christian mission. The reports from missionaries from different parts of the world spoke of difficulties and problems. Some of the problems were connected with the revival of non-Christian religions and the rising nationalism in Asian countries at that time. However it was felt that the difficulties could only help the progress of Christian mission. The Conference was confident that eastern religions and cultures would collapse in the near future and that the Gospel would triumph. This optimism was reflected in the report of Commission I.

Commission I was conscious that the revival of Buddhism in Japan, Burma and Ceylon, and Hinduism in India, meant more opposition to Christian mission. Yet the Commission felt that revival and opposition indicated that the people were getting alarmed at the progress of Christianity and that, in the end, it would only serve to hasten the progress of Christianity, as was the case in the Roman Empire. The Commission saw the new movement in Hinduism being a result of the influence of Christianity and thus preparing the way for the Gospel. With regard to Arya Samaj (a Hindu revival and reform movement in the Punjab), the Commission said that "the ideas which the Arya Samaj raises, without the ability to satisfy them, and the manifest contradiction of its system, mean not a remote collapse into the arms of Christianity".<sup>11</sup> Much of Edinburgh's optimism came from the fact that it was also an age of western imperialism. The Commission I report says, "One of the most significant and hopeful facts with reference to world evangelization is that the majority of the people of non-Christian nations and races are under the sway, either of Christian governments or of those who are not antagonistic to Christian missions. This should

greatly facilitate the carrying out of a comprehensive campaign to make Christ known".<sup>12</sup> Speaking of India, the report says, "This vast empire is the greatest trust given by God to any Christian nation. Clearly the deepest reason for this gracious responsibility is that the kingdom of Christ may be established in India. It is Britain's greatest responsibility; and it is likewise the greatest opportunity for the Christian churches of all parts of the world".<sup>13</sup> The Edinburgh Conference was only echoing the nineteenth century missionary interpretation of colonialism. In his book, *India and the Indian Missions*, Alexander Duff asks the question: What is the purpose of God in British colonialism? He answers: "Can it be without a reference to the grand design of providence and of grace that Britain so endowed has been led to assume the sovereignty of India ... A decree hath gone forth and who can stay its execution - that India be the Lord's".<sup>14</sup> Duff further speaks of the colonial wars as being a preparation for the Gospel.

In the history of Christian mission, 'Preparation for the Gospel' was a familiar theme. The New Testament writers interpreted Judaism as a preparation for the coming of Christianity. Alexandrian Fathers of the second and third centuries saw Greek philosophy as a preparation for the Gospel. The Edinburgh Conference spoke of 'preparation for the Gospel' in two different senses. For several of the missionaries, the missionary work done so far was only a preparation for the rapid growth of the Gospel which was yet to come - missionaries had, so far, been preparing the ground for transplanting the Gospel. By preparation they meant loosening the hold of non-Christian religions on the lives of the people through western Christian influence especially through western education. They meant by preparation, the destruction of Asian and African cultures and religions so that Christianity could be planted in their place. It was in the sense a clearing of the ground for Christianity to come in. The Commission I report says:

While thus far there may not have been many positive results to show, the negative effects have been none the less helpful in spreading the Gospel. They have helped to weaken the strength of heathendom. Even in the most difficult field, such as sections of the Mohammedan and Hindu communities of India, the work of the past one hundred years has been that of disintegration, and today we see the beginning of the breaking up of these gigantic systems. Were the Christian Church now to advance in the spirit and power of Christ, results could be achieved far

surpassing anything accomplished in the past.<sup>15</sup>

This understanding of 'Preparation for the Gospel' is made clearer in a statement by an American missionary mentioned in the Commission I report.

As Dr. Fulton pointed out at the Centenary Missionary Conference in China, the work of the foreign missionaries has not been unlike that of the work of reclamation carried out in the recent years by the United States government for the purpose of making productive areas of desert land. The problem has been that of assuring to these lands streams of water that will bring fertility and fruitfulness... So the work of the missionary enterprise hitherto had been largely that of tunneling mountains and constructing reservoirs and canals so as to be able to convey the water in adequate measure and continuity to the great multitudes in the waste and desert places of the non-Christian world. But this all-important preparatory work has now reached a stage where the life-giving streams should be released in far greater measure.<sup>16</sup>

The Conference addressed 'Preparation of the Gospel' in another sense also, in the sense that the non-Christian religions and cultures are themselves a point of contact, a preparation for the Gospel. The Gospel fulfils the longings and aspirations of the non-Christians and the non-Christian religions and cultures are a first step leading to the Gospel. Similarly several participants at the conference spoke of the national awakening that was taking place as a preparation for the Gospel. This approach is clearly seen in the report of Commission IV.

Commission IV on 'The missionary message in relation to non-Christian religions', advocates a conciliatory and sympathetic attitude to other religions and cultures. "A supreme need of the missionary teacher is a thorough knowledge of the religions of the people among whom he works. He should find Out the elements of truth and error in each, and seek to understand the beliefs and customs of the people".<sup>17</sup> A report from China said. "Accept the good and show how, in Jesus Christ, all its best is met and carried to the highest degree". The preacher should rejoice in the use which the Chinese made of the revelation which God gave to them and which made them superior to others. Christ came not to destroy but to fulfil. On the other hand indiscriminate praise or

censure, acceptance or rejection, is to be deprecated by all calm and candid minds,<sup>18</sup> Bergen, a missionary in China wrote, "But twenty six years' experience has led to a better appreciation of the Chinese stand point, and I now regard Christianity as the fulfillment of much that exists only as a promise in China".<sup>19</sup> The Commission report mentions Arnold Fraser saying, "In short the missionary will recognize the work of logos in every land; but since the logos has become flesh he must recognize the truth as it is in Jesus Christ as the standard of all".<sup>20</sup> Similar views are expressed in reports from Japan. The report from Japan points out that positive statements of the Christian faith and of its lofty principles and splendid hopes will create far more conviction than the criticism of the erroneous tenets of the native religions. It says:

The Christian preacher should constantly take the grand stand that every good teaching in the native faith is a gift of God, the Father of all men, and is a preparation for the coming of His fuller revelation in Jesus Christ. We should show our real and deep respect for the heathen religions; we should take off our hats at their shrines, as we expect them to do in our churches. We should ever insist that Christianity does not come to destroy anything that is good or true in the native faiths, but rather to stimulate, to strengthen, and fulfil it - to give it life and real energy. The trouble with the native religions is not that they possess no truth, but the truth they have is mixed up with folly and superstition that it is lost: it has no power - no life giving energy?<sup>21</sup>

The report mentioned that there were in Japan well-educated and able Japanese clergymen who hold that non-Christian religions are not wholly of man. At times they think and speak of them as a preparation for Christianity; and sometimes compare them to Judaism, as shadows of the good things to come.<sup>22</sup> The Commission report mentions P.G. Kawi of Japan saying that the Christian preacher should remember that in all human nature and in all religions there are elements of good which are a gift of God, and they are not to be despised or neglected but that the truths which already exist in the consciousness of the people should be linked with the higher truths which are revealed in Jesus Christ.<sup>23</sup>

The report on the Indian situation was also along similar lines. It mentioned that the existence of theism in Hinduism and the development of *bhakti* (loving devotion to a personal God) as a way of

redemption were as preparation for the Gospel. T.E. Slater, a missionary in India wrote that the philosophy of the Gita is essentially pantheistic, but the form of worship presented centers round a divine-human helper, and is therefore the best preparation in Hinduism for the Christian Gospel, since it reveals the hidden craving of the human heart to possess a humanized God, which can only be satisfied in Christ. C.F. Andrews of St. Stephen College, Delhi wrote, "The most important preparatio evangelica is to be found along the lines of Hindu theism."<sup>24</sup>

Commission IV report says that while for some both Indian theism and philosophy furnish a fruitful point of contact with Christianity, and preparation for it, there are others who take the view that they are fulfilled and superseded by Christianity. Of these Farquhar of Calcutta may be taken as a typical representative. Farquhar points out that the long succession of reforming theisms in India have arisen from the fact that the denial of true personality to the Supreme Being destroyed the possibility of true worship and prayer. The theistic reformers have thus behind them the undying and most sacred instincts of the human soul. But these theisms have failed because they have chosen as the objects of their worship individual Gods of the traditional pantheon. Hinduism has never succeeded in conceiving a universal personality which is the central conception of Christian theism. Farquhar holds that both theism and *vedanta* (monistic philosophy) provide many points of contact with Christianity, as each represents, however imperfectly, a side of the truth which the other ignores, and that in fact Christianity is the norm and the synthesis of all these several but living elements in Indian religion.<sup>25</sup>

In discussing the Christian message to non-Christian religions, the Edinburgh conference was not concerned with working out a relationship between Christianity and other religions and cultures, but rather how to win the non-Christians to Christ. Robert S. Speer in concluding the discussion on behalf of Commission IV made this clear. He said that there was unanimity about the finality and absoluteness of Christianity both before and after, the Conference. The conference discussions were not about the finality of Christian faith. The purpose was not to find "on what ground do we believe that Christianity is the final and absolute religion, but how may we induce religious men on the other side of the world to share our conviction"

Speer mentions a second concern of the Edinburgh conference in discussing non-Christian religions. It was to discern the effect of non-Christian religions on our apprehension and conception of Christianity.

As we lay Christianity over against the non-Christian religions of the world, we discover truths in Christianity which we had not discerned before, or truths in a glory, in a magnitude, that we had not before imagined. "The comparison does not impoverish Christianity, it does not result in our subtracting anything from the great bulk of Christian faith on which we have laid hold., but there is a sense in which non-Christian religions, while they are encumbrances upon the religious life of man, are also expressions of that religious life, as we bring our faith over against them. We shall not bring back into our faith what was not in our faith before, but we shall discern what we had not discovered was there before."<sup>26</sup> According to Speer only a Christianity understood by universal application to known life can avail to meet the needs of human life in any community or nation. What we need is a world-conquering Gospel. D.S. Cairns also stressed the same point when he asked, "What suggestions have these non-Christian religions to offer us in developing the latent elements of Christianity?" He points out that the situation in which the missionary movement at present faces the non-Christian religions is very similar to the spiritual situation which confronted Israel in the days of the great rise of prophecy. Israel had been getting on comfortably enough with its traditional religion when all of a sudden, it was confronted with the rise of the empires of the Euphrates. A shadow fell upon the whole of Israel's life. The spiritual leaders felt that in the traditional religion there must be more than they had already attained. "There must be reserve spiritual forces which would enable the chosen people to meet the new and formidable adversary which had arisen, and we see in the long and illustrious succession of the Hebrew prophets, the endeavor of the spiritual leaders of Israel to meet the new emergency by broadening and deepening and the intensifying of the nation's sense of the living God."

The concern expressed by Edinburgh as to the effect of non-Christian religions on our appreciation and conception of Christianity, is a very important one not only for Christian mission but also for the development of Christian theology. The tendency in the missionary movement as well as churches in general, was to treat the works of pagans with scorn and condescension and to think that the pagans needed to be enlightened as their views on Christianity were false. Christian missionaries and theologians have often forgotten the fact that the non-Christian religions and their interpreters have a mission to Christianity and Christians. It was this fact which the Commission TV of Edinburgh raised very strongly. The early Christian thinkers in the Roman Empire took very seriously the criticism of Christianity by

pagan philosophers. The pagan critics and their views helped Christians of the time to see their own position more clearly and to also re-state Christian theology in dialogue and discussion with alternative points of view. Similarly, today Christians need to listen to the voices of Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims and others and see their theological position vis-à-vis that of others, and thus move away from a theology of 'self-reference', and explore a lively theology of 'cross-reference'. It must be noted that a number of non-Christian leaders in both Asia and Africa, have tried to understand Jesus Christ and the meaning of Christ today; their interpretation of Christianity and Jesus Christ are of utmost significance to the development of Christian theology in Asia and Africa.

### **Jerusalem 1928**

After the Edinburgh Conference, the missionary movement paid greater attention to the relationship of Christian faith to other religious traditions. The search begun in Edinburgh to find out what was alive in other living traditions in contrast to what was traditional and formal, and what aspects of the Christian Gospel possessed the greater power of appeal to non-Christians, continued in the pages of the *International Missionary Review* (IRM) first published in 1912 under the editorship of J.H. Oldham. Several of the articles appearing in the IRM expressed positive attitudes and approaches to other religions and cultures. According to Tasuku Harada of Japan, "it is inconceivable that anyone who has impartially studied the history of religions can fail to admit the universality of the activity of the Spirit of God and the consequent embodiment of a decree of truth in all religions."<sup>28</sup> Nicol Macnicol, a British missionary in India, wrote that Hindu seekers are seeking not only God's gifts but also God Himself; "dare we say that there are no finders?"<sup>29</sup> Several of them recalled the example of early Church Fathers in their approach to Greek philosophy and culture. K. Mackichan of Bombay saw gleams of truth in Hindu religion and philosophy which the Christian church ought to be ready to accept as evidence of the "diffused energy of the divine logos".<sup>30</sup> G.A. Lefroy of Calcutta found in the Muslim world signs of a spirit naturally Christian.<sup>31</sup>

But there were others, especially among the Continental theologians, who took a very exclusive view of Christianity. For example, Julius Richter, Professor of Missions in Berlin University, in his inaugural address said: "Christianity is an exclusive religion. Wherever Christian

missionary enterprise comes into contact with the non-Christian religions it sets itself to oust them ... in the conviction that this is necessary to the salvation of their adherents" ..<sup>32</sup> According to Ritchter, the Christian missionary needs to be convinced of the superiority of his religion to all others, "a conviction all the more necessary in view of the prevailing 'history of religions' school of the day which threatens to level down the religious conception of humanity to an unrelieved relativism". Similarly Prof. Frick of the University of Geissen insisted that 'fragile and treacherous' as the Christianity offered might be, Christian mission must be based upon a conviction of the superiority of their message if they are to remain sound and honest; and so the missionaries and Christians generally may not surrender the conviction of superiority.<sup>33</sup>

Both these positive and negative views about other religions were also aired at the Jerusalem Conference. In a paper written for the Conference, Nicol Macnicol again spoke of the positive contribution of Hinduism. He said that there is much that is precious and beautiful in the Indian heritage and the Christian missionary in bringing Christianity to the Indian people shall preserve and strengthen all that is noble and destroy only the unworthy and evil. Christ, as He enters the Hindu milieu will make what He finds there that is fair, far more fair, taking away only what is unworthy. He shall not quench the smoking flax. Macnicol was fully aware of the evils of caste, impersonal pantheism and other evils of Hinduism, yet he disliked the talk of Christian superiority.

There were others at Jerusalem who stressed the uniqueness of the Christian Gospel. Nathan Soderblom in his paper pointed out that Buddha, Mohammed and Christ are quite different. But he said that Christianity is unique and, the absolute truth in Christianity has the shape not of rule, law (Dharma), ideas or theologies, but the shape of a man: God reveals himself in a human life. Christ is no avatar, nor a divine messenger, but he is the unique Son of God. "This claim of uniqueness, of absolute truth itself belongs to the originality of the biblical revelation. The claim was inherited from Judaism ... We do not find anywhere in the great religions that claim of being unique which characterizes authentic Christianity from the very beginning. The other great religions are not only tolerant, they are eclectic, in principle if not in fact ...Christianity puts up against all such ideas, its own truth."<sup>34</sup>

It was recognized at Edinburgh that the following ten years would in all probability constitute a turning point in human history and might be

more of critical importance in determining the spiritual revolution of human kind than many centuries of ordinary experience. Undoubtedly they were, but scarcely as the delegates at Edinburgh had expected. The next ten years were to be fateful years for the world and the church. The Western world was facing a crisis of culture, a tragic process of disintegration. It was a world which radically challenged the Christian faith in rival ideologies of Marxism, Fascism and Secularism. The missionary message in relation to non-Christian religions was a concern at the Edinburgh Conference. In Jerusalem, it was the Christian life and message in relation to non-Christian systems of thought and life. When it came to real grips with the problems of non-Christian systems, it was not just Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism that held the attention, but also the materialistic secular civilization that had sprung up in the midst of western Christendom.<sup>35</sup>

In 1928 the Western world has begun to see itself as the author of great materialistic and industrial forces and inter-racial antagonisms which form in their uncontrolled state a common menace to the world's life and especially to the life of the Spirit. It seems that its own life is thus certainly not in tune with the Gospel that it has been sending to the world; it is not even wholly sure of the full meaning of that Gospel. Therefore the Western world is itself a mission field.<sup>36</sup>

At the suggestion of J.H. Oldham, John R. Mott had invited Rufus Jones, an American Quaker, to present a paper. His paper was entitled, "Secular Civilization and the Christian Task". Rufus Jones' keen analysis of secularism helped the delegates at the Jerusalem Conference to see, with clarity, that mission could not be defined fully in geographical terms. He wrote:

We go to Jerusalem then, not as members of a Christian nation to convert other nations which are not Christian, but as Christians within a nation far too largely non-Christian, who face within their own borders the competition of a rival movement as powerful, as dangerous, as insidious as any of the great historic religions. We meet our fellow Christians in these countries, therefore, on terms of equality, as fellow workers engaged in a common task.<sup>37</sup>

He pointed out that the greatest rival for Christianity was not Islam, Buddhism or Hinduism, but a worldwide secular way of life and the interpretation of the nature of things. Faced with such an universal phenomenon, the response of the Christians must be to view other religions which secularism attacks, as witnesses of man's need for God and allies in our quest for perfection. For Rufus Jones, the world conflict was between Christianity and secularism.

The most important action of the Conference was to formulate the Christian message and address it to the world . In the face of non-Christian religions and secularism, the burning question that had to be addressed was: Is there a Christian life and a Christian message that is distinctive, universally valid, sufficient and authoritative ?<sup>38</sup> . The Jerusalem Conference did not take for granted the Christian message and motivation for mission, as its predecessor in Edinburgh had. The discussion of the Christian message in Jerusalem centered on two major issues. First was the antithesis between those on the one hand (mainly Continentals) who wanted to stress the absolute uniqueness of the Gospel revealed in Jesus Christ, and those on the other hand (some of the Anglo-American) who had been influenced by the comparative study of religions and did not want to overlook the religious values in the non-Christian religions. The other issue had to do with the difference of opinion over the social responsibility and concern of the church in the world. These differences reflected the outlook of the delegates on the motives, purpose, and goals of mission. In such a situation the drafting of the message of the Assembly was not easy. The task fell on William Temple.<sup>39</sup> The Message recognizes divine light in other religions. It says: "We rejoice to think that just because in Jesus Christ the light that lighteth every man shone forth in its full splendor, we find the rays of that same light where He is unknown or even is rejected. We welcome every noble quality in non-Christian persons or systems as further proof that the Father, who sent His Son to the world, has nowhere left Himself without witness".

The message called on all the followers of non-Christian religions to join the Christians in the study of Jesus Christ as He stands before us in the Scriptures, to hold fast to faith in the unseen and eternal in the face of growing materialism of the world; to cooperate with Christians against all the evils of secularism; to respect the freedom of conscience; and to discern that "all the good of which men have conceived is fulfilled and secured in Christ". The Message emphasized the fact that Christianity was not a western religion and called all people to have

equal fellowship in Him. To come to Him always involves self-surrender. We must not come in the pride of national heritage or religious tradition. Just because Christ is the self-disclosure of the one God, all human aspirations are towards Him, and of no human tradition is he merely the continuation. He is the desire of all nations; but He is always more, and other than they had desired before they learnt of Him. But we would not insist that when the Gospel of the love of God comes home with power to the human heart, it speaks to each man, not as Moslem or as an adherent of any system but just as men. And while we rightly study other religions in order to approach men wisely, yet at the last we speak as men to men, inviting them to share with us the pardon and the life we have formed in Christ.

The Message made it clear that our message to the world is Jesus Christ. "He himself is the Gospel and the Gospel is the message of the church to the world". As to the motive for Christian mission, it pointed out that the Gospel is the answer to the world's greatest needs. "Its very nature forbids us to say that it may be the right belief for some and not for others. Either it is true for all, or it is not true at all". In coming into fellowship with Christ, we find in ourselves an overmastering impulse to share Him with others. He has become life for us. We should share that life. We do not go to the nations called non-Christian because they are the worst and they alone are in need. We go because they are part of the world and share with us in the same human need - the need for redemption from ourselves and from sin, the need to have life complete and abundant. Here lies the Christian motive; it is simple. We cannot live without Christ and we cannot bear to think of other people living without Him. "Christ is our motive, and Christ is our end. We must give nothing less, and we cannot give more".<sup>40</sup>

The years between the Jerusalem Conference, and the next one which was held in Madras (India), were very creative in the field of theology of mission. The discussions on the subject of Christianity and non-Christian religions continued in the pages of the IRM. A number of books on the subject also appeared. However, two events of major significance in the field were the publication of the report of the Layman's Foreign Missions Inquiry in 1932 under the title: Re-thinking Missions, and Hendrik Kramer's book: The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World in 1938, written for discussion at the Madras meeting of the IMC.<sup>41</sup>

The Layman's Foreign Missions Inquiry was jointly sponsored by eight

mission boards in the USA. The chairman of the Commission of Inquiry was W.E. Hocking who was a Professor of Philosophy at Harvard University and a Congregational layman. The purpose of the Inquiry was to review the work of foreign missions in Asia. When the findings of the Inquiry were published in the early 1930s, it led to controversies. As always, there were those who disagreed and those who accepted the findings of the Inquiry.

Robert Speer, John A. Mackay, K.S. Latourette were all very critical of the theological assumptions of the report, especially its Christology. The Inquiry spoke of two ways of understanding the person Jesus Christ. One is that Jesus is a supreme religious teacher and exemplar of a life lived in union with God, whose example provides support for those who subsequently desire to carry out the same ventures. The second view is that Christ who "to many Christians offered a life of fellowship in union with himself and with other Christians in the fellowship of his Church", is in a unique sense the Son of God. But beneath them there are underlying agreements belonging to the essence of Christianity. As Timothy Yates observed it would have been a tragic mistake to shelve the volumes of the Inquiry on the grounds of criticisms of less-than-adequate Christian theology. In its attempt to follow through a comprehensive view of missions, the Inquiry served the missions well with its critique and attempt to apply correctives to existing programs. As part of this, it supplied a searching appraisal of the educational, medical and agricultural responses to human need of missions, which was of considerable value, as was the firm support and backing given to the younger churches in their search for independence and indigenization.<sup>42</sup>

Chairman of the Commission W.E.Hocking was concerned about the search for a world community in which different religions could co-exist and where each would make its own contribution to the total life. Here, Christian, Buddhist, Hindu and Confucianist could open to one another the treasures of their discoveries, so mutually advancing in truth and authenticity. For him the ultimate object of all missionary enterprise was the creation of a common spiritual life among men. These ideas of Hocking were included in the final report. It stated that the aim of mission is to seek with people of other lands a true knowledge and love of God, expressing in life and word what we have learned through Christ.<sup>43</sup> The Christian will look forward not to the destruction of non-Christian religions, but to their continued coexistence with Christianity, each stimulating the other in the growth toward the ultimate goal, unity

in the completest religious truth.<sup>44</sup> The Christian will, therefore, regard himself as a co-worker with the forces within each religious system which are making for righteousness.<sup>45</sup> This approach departed sharply from the traditional concept of mission. In such a scheme, conceptions of uniqueness, absoluteness or finality disappear.

Archibald C. Baker, Associate Professor of Missions in the University of Chicago was one of those who welcomed the findings of the Layman's Inquiry. In 1934, he published a book: *Christian Missions and a New World Culture*.<sup>46</sup> In it he raises a number of questions with regard to the assumptions as well as the practice of missions. He asks: What is the primary aim of missions? What is the most valuable religious contribution which we can make to the non-Christian world? The Jerusalem Conference had said that our Gospel is Jesus Christ. Baker asks: Is it enough to say that Jesus Christ is our Gospel, and if so, what does that mean? Has the Christian anything unique, absolute and final in his religion, or "are we rather transmitting to the rest of the world the idealised and spiritualised aspects of our Western culture"? What is the relation of Christianity to other religions? Does the Christian already possess ultimate standards and norms, or must Christians and non-Christians look elsewhere for standards of truth and goodness? Will Christianity overthrow all other religions? Will it be fused with theism in an eclectic world-religion?<sup>47</sup>

Baker points out that Christians often apply historical and scientific research to the claims of other religions, but refuse to apply the same method to Christian religion. They insist that there exists, in Christianity, a divine revelation or at least an inner essence of such a nature that lies beyond the reach of critical examinations. They hold it with a finality which permits no questions. They are to be accepted through faith. It is important, he says, that before we go any further, we examine the assumptions upon which we are operating. The religions of the world are related to one another and dependent on each other because of the fact that they all emerge in the same process which has been working through the ages, and according to the same laws of this process. "There is no more reason for the Christian to claim special miraculous origin for his religion than for the Japanese to boast that they are the chosen children of heaven". To admit this does not for a moment require us to hold that one religion is as good as the other. There are striking differences. Each religion - theistic, pantheistic, polytheistic, monistic or pluralistic - may be described as experimenting in its own peculiar manner with the problems of life. Some experiments have been

more fruitful than others.<sup>48</sup> Yet none can claim absolute finality. The Christian must assume such attitudes towards his own religion and also towards those of other peoples, as are warranted by the great basic facts of common origins and mutual dependence.

Too long have men boasted: "We have Abraham to our father", or Confucius, or Mohammed or Christ. It is just such excessive pull of ancestry in religion, nation and race which perpetuates old delusions, inflates the heart with false conceits, and sets a man against his neighbor. What is called for on the part of Christian and non-Christian is a mutual understanding, an attitude of sympathy and good will, a readiness to give and take, and a willingness to sacrifice when necessary for the larger good.<sup>49</sup>

Baker mentions that there is no one Christian message, but several, and all of them are only relatively true and final. Throughout the history of the church, the person of Jesus has served as a center of reference and symbol of religious values as these have been recreated by His followers out of their own enlarging experience. Some others prefer to take the more general concept, God rather than the idealized historical figure of Jesus Christ as the center of reference about which their lives are focussed. It is important to note, however, that more important than any particular symbol are the values symbolized. Love, joy, peace, courage, righteousness, the elevation of women, the right of children for a fair start in life, the sense of being at home in the universe - all these hold their worth for the human race whether they bear the name Christian or Buddhist. These priceless treasures are not exclusively the possession, nor the gift, of the Christian religion. "Therefore, so long as human lives are actually being enriched by these values and by this sense of reality, the specific auspices under which this was being accomplished - Christian, non-Christian, or scientific - are matters of secondary importance. So with regard to missionary motivation, he says:

Consequently, the missionary enters heartily into this process of mutual exchange and the stimulation one of another unto good works. He believes that by so doing the possibilities which lie dormant in other people and within himself will be brought to their fullest function. Inevitably this gives rise to a rejection and a selection of the different contributions offered.<sup>50</sup>

Baker points out that a new school of missionary interpretation is appearing which abandons all claims to absolutism and finality, which trusts less on persuasion, and relies more upon the methods of joint deliberations. Missions become a co-operative quest for truth, a co-operative activity for the good of humankind. "Those who are confident of the truth which they possess are sufficiently confident to place it again in the fiery furnace of criticism. They are ready to meet with all sincere men about the basic issues of life, which are the common meeting grounds for all"<sup>51</sup> It is in the light of the relationship of various religions to the common process that uniqueness and universality must be understood, Every personality, every historic event has within it elements of uniqueness as well as of universality. It is in this sense that the uniqueness and universality of Jesus Christ is offered to the rest of the world. When such exchange continues, there is the possibility of regional worlds being fused into a planetary world: "that what originates as the special discovery of one people will, by adoption, become the property of all".

But at the same time, and partly by the same process of cross-fertilization new forms of uniqueness will spring up, to preserve the variety so necessary for the progress and for' the enrichment of life. Consequently there is little warrant for the belief either that Christianity eventually will overthrow all its rivals, that Christianity will remain unchanged in all countries and through out all ages, or that some synthetic religion will in the end cover the earth.<sup>52</sup>

The views expressed by the Layman's Inquiry report and that by Baker created great storms in missionary circles. When H. Kramer wrote his book: *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World*, he was also responding to the views expressed by the report and by Baker.

### **Madras (Tambaram) 1938**

It was not only Kramer's book but also his presentation at the Conference on the subject, "Continuity and Discontinuity" which were under consideration in Madras. Hendrick Kramer (1888-1965) was a Dutch missiologist. He worked as a missionary in Indonesia for some time and later became the first Director of the World Council of Churches' Ecumenical Institute at Bossey, Switzerland. He was present at the Jerusalem Conference and made valuable contributions to the

discussion there. The International Missionary Council invited Kramer to write a book stating "the fundamental position of the Christian Church as a witness-bearing body in the modern world, relating this to different conflicting views of the attitude to be taken by Christians towards other faiths, and dealing in detail with the evangelistic approach to the great non-Christian faiths".<sup>53</sup> It was meant to be a preparatory volume for the Madras Conference. As the report of the Madras Meeting states, "What he produced was a searching critique of the entire missionary approach to the non-Christian religions and the world in which they are set, based upon certain clear cut theological positions".<sup>54</sup> The book gave rise to widespread discussions all over the world.

Kramer made it clear from the outset that the church's concern for the non-Christian world was inspired by its prime apostolic obligation of bearing witness to the world; for the essential nature of the church is that it is an apostolic body.

It is this, not because its authority is derived from the apostles, for the apostles belong to the Church, but because in all its words and actions it ought to be a bearer of witness to God and His decisive creative and redeeming acts and purposes. To become conscious of its apostolic character is for the Church the surest way to take hold of its real essence and substance. And this, to take hold of its real essence and substance, has to be the object before us when we are thinking about the Christian message in a non-Christian world or the fundamental position of the Christian Church as a witness-bearing body in the modern world.<sup>55</sup>

Kramer said that the whole situation, both in the church and in the world, necessitated a re-orientation of the missionary enterprise. The missionary movement needed to recapture the certitude of having the apostolic obligation towards the world of witnessing to Christ and His new Kingdom. "For all subsidiary arguments or motives, that have often usurped practically the place of the primary motive, are smitten to pieces under the hammer of the times ... Sharing religious experiences, even service to men, 'Christianizing' the social, economic and political order, although included in the living act of manifold missionary expression, cannot be the real motive and ultimate purpose" <sup>56</sup>

According to Kramer, two great evils of our time are secularism and

relativism. He writes, "The outstanding characteristic of our time is the complete disappearance of all absolutes, and the victorious but dreadful domination of the spirit and attitude of relativism".<sup>57</sup> Religion, morality, systems of life, standards, spiritual values, normative principles, social orders are all divested of any absolute character or significance. "This, however, is only an addition to a more fundamental uncertainty that eats at the vital centers of human life. The problem of religious certainty is the ultimate problem of modern man. And the problem of religious certainty is the eternal human problem of God; always evaded, yet ever and ever again obtruding itself upon man".<sup>58</sup> Kramer says that many people are not aware that the fundamental problem for them is the complete lack of absolutes in their life, their wholehearted surrender to the dominion of their life by relativism, their fundamental and radical uncertainty about the meaning of life.

Certainly there is spiritual hunger, but in most cases it is unconscious... Of course there are ideals. The world bristles with idealisms, noble and ridiculous, pure and demonic, because man cannot live without them... Absolutes however these are not, only pseudo absolutes. Those pseudo absolutes - race, nation, classless society, a "holy" or "eternal" country - clearly demonstrate that man cannot live on bread, on relativism, alone.<sup>59</sup>

Human beings long for certainty but it is a fact that she or he cannot produce it by his or her own efforts. Kramer argues that this religious certainty is given only in the Christian Gospel, because it is the work of God. The revelation in Christ hangs entirely upon God's sovereign initiative. Christian faith rests in the recognition and acceptance of the absolute authority of the word of God as found in God's self-disclosing revelation in Jesus Christ.

The absolutely distinctive and unique thing about Christianity is the fact of the Person of Christ. God was truly revealed in Jesus Christ. Neither flesh nor blood can reveal it, only God Himself. "If the flesh and blood could reveal it, then it would be no revelation but human intuition or power of apprehension. Revelation in Jesus Christ is a free divine act of redemptive eruption into the life of human being and the world".<sup>60</sup> This is an offence to man, because all philosophy, all idealistic religion, all consistent mystical religion, all moralism meet in one point. They constitute various endeavors for self-redemption, and instinctively reject the truth that God and God alone can work redemption.<sup>61</sup>

The only legitimate source from which to take knowledge of the Christian faith in its real substance is the Bible; there the witness of the prophets and the apostles is to be found on which the church is built.<sup>62</sup> Kramer points out that during the last hundred years the Bible has come under searching and critical investigation of scholars. Efforts have been made to show that Christianity is part of an immanent process of human creativity in the field of religion, to explain it as an outcome of religious development in the Jewish and Hellenistic world and to demonstrate its kinship to mystery religions, all aimed at making Christianity the result of the immanent process of history. "It is one of the most fascinating things to notice that Christianity, the religion of revelation, constantly eludes those endeavors. The origins of Christianity are irreducible. A deeper and purer awareness of the peculiar character and object of Christian faith has been the result".<sup>63</sup>

The Christian revelation in Jesus Christ is absolutely *sui generis* according to Kramer. It is the story of God's redeeming act in Jesus Christ. The Bible consistently testifies to His acts and plans in regard to the salvation of humankind and of the world. It is not a book of religious experiences, though religious experiences are not absent from it. What is central and fundamental in the Bible is the registering and description of, and witnessing to, God's creative and redemptive dealings with His world. The peculiar character of the Bible is that it is radically religious. The Bible is also intensely ethical, but the ethical is subordinated to the religious. The Bible is also radically theocratic. God, His holy will, His acts, His love, His justice, is the beginning and end of all. Human beings and the world are brought in direct, immediate relationship to this God, who always takes the initiative. The Bible takes, in a radically serious fashion, the fact that God is God, that He is the Absolute Sovereign and the only rightful Lord, with all the consequences that are implied herein for the world, human life and the position of human beings. "In this point consist the originality and uniqueness of the Bible; and also its perennial strangeness and newness to us, however intimate we may be with it. Real contact with the Bible means a constantly recurring process of conversion of our normal thinking and judgements".<sup>64</sup> This radical nature of the Bible, Kramer refers to as, Biblical Realism.

For Kramer, God's revelation in Jesus Christ as recorded in the Bible is the fundamental starting point and criterion of all Christian and theological thinking. It is from this stand point Kramer speaks about the Christian attitude towards the non-Christian religions. For a Christian

"the only standard of reference can be the new and unmeasurable world which has been revealed and made real by God in Jesus Christ and His life and work, and which is accessible to faith alone ... Christ, as the ultimate standard of reference, is the crisis of all religions, of the non-Christian religions and of empirical Christianity. This implies that the most fruitful and legitimate way to analyze and evaluate all religions is to investigate them in the light of the revelation of Christ".<sup>65</sup> Kramer evaluates other religions in the light of the Christian revelation and poses the question: Does God - and if so, how and where does God - reveal Himself in the religious life as present in the non-Christian religions.<sup>66</sup>

Human beings, in the light of the Revelation in Christ, are God's creatures, destined to be His children and co-workers, hence of great worth and possessing great qualities. Human nature and condition, however, has become perverted by a radical self-centeredness, the root of sin and death in the world. The God-rooted origin and end, and the splendid God-given qualities, assert themselves still in ways in which people try to master and regulate life, as manifested in the great achievements in the fields of culture, art, science, political, social and economic life. Kramer says that all religions, high or low, all philosophies, and world views, are the various efforts of mankind to apprehend the totality of existence, "often stirring in their sublimity and as often pathetic or revolting in their ineffectiveness".<sup>67</sup> So philosophy is this effort towards apprehension by way of knowledge; religion is the same effort by the way of the heart; theology, as for example, Muslim theology or Ramanuja's bhakti theology, is an effort to reflect in a system of coherent thinking, the religious apprehension of existence. These universal attempts show that there is an universal religious consciousness among all peoples. But since all these are human efforts, they all also share in the human sin. "This fundamental disharmony is also manifested in all the spheres of life in which man moves, and in his cultural and religious achievements".<sup>68</sup> Kramer writes:

In the domain of religious consciousness man's possibilities and abilities share in the lofty religious and ethical systems that he has produced and tried to live by. The non-Christian world in the past and present offers many illustrious examples. His sin and his subjection to evil and to satanic forces, however, corrupt all his creations and achievements, even the sublimes. in the most vicious way... The Christian revelation places itself

over against many efforts to apprehend the totality of existence. It asserts itself as the record of God's self-disclosing and re-creating revelation in Jesus Christ, as an apprehension of existence that revolves around the poles of divine judgement and divine salvation, giving the divine answer to this demonic and guilty disharmony of man and the world. <sup>69</sup>

In the illuminating light of the revelation of Christ, says Kramer, "all religious life, the lofty and degraded, appear to be under the divine judgement, because it is misdirected"<sup>70</sup> Kramer is of the view that all non-Christian religions, philosophies, and world 'views' are the product of the efforts of various people to apprehend the totality of existence. They are an attempt at self-deliverance, self-justification and self-sanctification. They shed a totally different light on the crucial questions of God, man and the world from what is shed upon them when we start from the person of Christ. Therefore he says that the revelation of God in Jesus Christ is discontinuous even with what is normally held to be "what is best" in other religions.<sup>71</sup> In his book: *Why Christianity Of All Religions?* he wrote:

To put it really in as many words: in the light of Jesus Christ. who does not bring a Revelation from God but is himself the Revelation of God, the main thing about all religions - the heart and soul of them, as it were - is that they are fleeing from God; and I mean here not a generalized Godhead comprising all the different ways of picturing a deity, but quite specifically the God who is the God and Father of Jesus Christ. It is in that sense that, splendid as is the spirit which so often informs them, they are in error. Their natural tendency is all in the direction of self-will, of self-justification, even though it is only in the light of Jesus Christ that this becomes apparent; and thus it is that we come to understand them as a flight from God, a refusal to let God decide what the good of man really is and what it means to be truly man, an iron determination to decide these things for themselves and so to set man up as himself the key to the problem and enigma of man.<sup>73</sup>

For Kramer, 'nature', 'reason' and 'history' do not afford preambles, avenues or lines of development towards the realm of grace and truth as manifest in Jesus Christ. Therefore, he rejects the attempts to find points of contact between Christianity and non-Christian religions, or to speak of Christianity as fulfillment of the longings and aspirations of the non-Christians, or to consider non-Christian religions as 'preparation' for the

## Gospel.<sup>73</sup>

The Christian maintains, in the face of the highest and loftiest religious and moral achievements in the non-Christian religions, that they need conversion and regeneration as much as the ordinary sinner needs it; because the meaning of Christ is that He makes all things new, and that, according to Jesus' words, "the least in the kingdom of Heaven is greater than John the Baptist", who was greater than anyone "among the sons of women".<sup>74</sup>

Kramer concludes his argument thus:

To sum up, from the standpoint of Biblical realism the attitude towards the non-Christian religions, and likewise the relation of the Christian Church to the world in all its domains, is the combination of a prophetic, apostolic heraldship of truth for Christ's sake with a priestly apostolic ambassadorship of love for His sake. The, right attitude of the Church, properly understood, is essentially a missionary one, the Church being set by God in the world as ambassador of His reconciliation, which is the truth that outshines all truth and the grace that works faithful love.<sup>75</sup>

## **The Debate in Madras**

Though Kramer's book and his presentation at the Conference on "Continuity or Discontinuity" were dominant influences at Madras, there were several among the participants who disagreed with his views. As Timothy Yates observed, the immediate responses varied between William Temple's Forward, commending it a book likely to remain for many years to come the classical treatment of its theme to C.F. Andrews' response which was to drop it 'unceremoniously' into the waste paper basket.<sup>76</sup>

H. Hartenstein, the German Director of Missions, was one of those who agreed wholeheartedly with Kramer's approach. In his paper, "The Biblical View of Religion", he supported Kramer's thesis by referring to the biblical interpretation of religions. For him, the non-Christian religions highlighted a deep longing and groping of the human soul towards the Holy God, and of his constant running away from God in

blindness and rebellion.<sup>77</sup>

On the contrary, T.C. Chao of China, said:

The all mighty and all-loving God being the creator of the universe, we can safely say that nature and man, in different and progressive orders, reveal God and His divine character and power. Nature reveals his power and intelligence while humanity reveals, especially in the lives of sages and prophets, His love and righteousness. All nations, with their various religions, have seen God more or less clearly, although the forms in which their visions have been clothed are incomplete, insufficient and unsatisfactory. In them and in Jesus Christ, God has been revealing Himself the same self to mankind.<sup>78</sup>

While Hartenstein supported Kramer's position by appealing to the biblical view of religion, Karl Ludvig Reichelt of the Norwegian Missionary Society disagreed with Kramer on the basis of the fourth Gospel. Based on the Logos Christology of St. John, Reichelt pointed out that all that is true, good and noble in all nations and races, in all cultures and religions, have their origin in Jesus Christ. There is a special function of Christ to be styled, Logos Spermatikos. This means that the Spirit of Christ, which like a grain of seed lying behind the religious systems in the non-Christian religions and cultures, is sprouting in faith, sometimes dimly and sometimes in real beauty and splendor, in poetry, rituals, holy scripture and external arrangements. Those who have received the logos-light are born of God and are therefore the children of God. Finally the Logos became flesh. From that hour, we have not only the Logos as a grain of seed or a small beam of light but God revealed in His fullness. For this reason, nobody can be compared to Jesus Christ. Christ has been working everywhere through all ages and we shall gratefully and joyfully use the material that He himself has prepared for the coming Kingdom.<sup>79</sup>

Walter Marshall Horton, in his article: *Between Hocking and Kramer*, agrees with Kramer when he says that it is by the revelation of God in Jesus Christ that all man-made religions, i.e., all existing religious movements including empirical Christianity are to be judged. But Horton says, "Hesitation begins when I confront Kramer's doctrine that the great Eastern faiths are to be interpreted, in the main, as various forms of self-deification, resulting from man's inveterate propensity to

carry his drive for self-realization up to the transcendent level, until at last he claims partnership with gods themselves". <sup>80</sup> He went on:

There is, of course, more than a verbal difference between that high Augustinian School of thought to which Barth and Kramer belong and that more liberal school of theology which, from Justin Martyr and Clement of Alexandria down to Rufus Jones and Dean Inge, has always believed in the effective presence of the Logos spermatikos among all peoples. I am for Barth and Kramer when they insist that the highest mystical illumination may act as a bar instead of a gateway for the truth as it is in Christ, which is only to be revealed through the lowly gate of repentance. I am against them when they use language that seems to - deny that God's presence and power are effectively active in the heathen world. <sup>81</sup>

Horton pointed out that we do not claim to possess the truth of God in its entirety. When we face the mystery of the future and the mystery of death, we humbly acknowledge that much is veiled from our sight. "When we sit down to speculate on these themes with men of other faiths, we sit down with them as fellow mortals, bound like them by our bins and our finiteness, still wondering and hoping rather than "knowing" as the agnostics and theosophists claim to know" <sup>82</sup>

H.H. Farmer, pointed out that for Kramer, the basic relationship in which God stands to human beings was one of absolute sovereign will; it was conceived to be a relationship of complete and unqualified submission and obedience. The personal relationship was not thought of as "Fatherly love". "It is much easier for those who set the personal emphasis on sovereignty to view the religious life of mankind on the one hand and God on the other as standing over against one another in a kind of isolation, than it is for those who set the personal emphasis on fatherly love". <sup>83</sup>

A.G. Hogg, after stating that religious life in Christian religion was a life 'hid with Christ in God,' asks: Can there be, within the non-Christian religions, in those for whom their religion is a living personal possession, a life which, although without Christ, is yet somehow a life 'hid in God'? Is there any such thing as a religious faith which in quality or texture is not definitely Christian but in the approach to which one

ought to put the shoes off the feet, recognizing one is on the holy ground of a two sided commerce between God and man? In non-Christian faith may we meet with something that is not merely a seeking but, on a real measure, a finding by contact with which a Christian may be helped to make fresh discoveries in his own finding of God in Christ? Hogg's answers to these questions were in the affirmative. He emphatically stated, "It is radically wrong for the missionary to approach men of other faiths under a conviction that he and his fellow believers are witnesses to a divine revelation, while other religions are exclusively the product of a human "religious consciousness".<sup>84</sup> He went on to say that Kramer asserted that Christianity was unique because it was created by the occurrence of revelation. Without the revelatory initiative of God, there would be no religion. But, says Hogg, "Christianity is unique because of the unique content of the revelation of which it is the apprehension and product, and fo which it bears witness. And that content must win conviction by its own appeal, by its illuminating and renovating power".<sup>85</sup>

The Conference, in its Findings, made it clear that Jesus Christ was the way for all people and he alone was adequate for the world's needs. The Findings said, "Our message is that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself. We believe that God revealed Himself to Israel, preparing the way for His full revelation in Jesus Christ, His Son, our Lord. We believe that Christ is the way for all, that He alone is adequate for the world's need. Therefore we want to bear witness to Him in all the world."<sup>86</sup>

The Findings recognized in other religions, values of deep religious experiences and great moral achievements. However, it said:

Yet we are bold enough to call men out from them to the feet of Christ. We do so because we believe that in Him alone is the full salvation which man needs. Mankind has nothing to be compared with the redeeming love of God in the life and death and resurrection of Christ... We do not think that God has left Himself without witness in the world at any time. Men have been seeking Him all through the ages. Often this seeking and longing has been misunderstood. But we see glimpses of God's light in the world of religions, showing that His yearning after His erring children has not been without response. Yet we believe that all religious insights and religious experiences

have to be fully tested before God in Christ; and we see that this is true as well within as outside the Christian Church. Christ is revolutionary; He brings conversion and regeneration when we meet Him, from whatever point we may have started.<sup>87</sup>

The Findings saw this to mean that the missionary should take a deep and sincere interest in the religious life of the people among whom he worked, but that the interest in the religious heritage of the nations must not lead to the assumption that the scriptures of these religions could replace the Old Testament as an introduction to the Christian Gospel. Where a church grows up in an environment of non-Christian religions and cultures, it is necessary that it become firmly rooted in Christian heritage and in the fellowship of the church universal. It is necessary that it should also be rooted in the soil of their own country. The Gospel should be experienced and interpreted in indigenous forms, and that in methods of worship, institutions, literature, architecture, and so on, the spiritual heritage of the nation and the country should be taken into use.

Hendrik Kramer's theology was essentially that of the Protestant Reformers of the 16th century. According to medieval thinking, two types of knowledge of God, the natural and the revealed, compliment each other. This synthesis was broken at the time of the Reformation. For the reformers, these two kinds of knowledge of God were fundamentally opposed. Following Augustine's lead, Luther and Calvin stressed the negative consequences of the Fall arguing that it had resulted in the corruption of human reason. "Since natural theology resulted from the exercise of fallen human powers of speculation, it became for the reformers a highly suspect enterprise, which, viewed in the light of the cardinal doctrine of justification by Grace, was no more than man's arrogant attempt to storm the ramparts of heaven... Since all non-Christian religious beliefs were thought to be based on this dubious foundation of natural knowledge, it followed that all the forms of heathenism were bereft of truth, and that no salvation was to be found within them".<sup>88</sup> Luther conceded that there was universal knowledge of God among all heathen and that this light could not be subdued or extinguished. He also indicated that this God could not be identified. Reason never finds true God, but it finds devils or its own concept of God ruled by the devil.<sup>89</sup> It was this Reformation theology which Kramer applied at Madras to the non-Christian religions. In this he was greatly influenced by the Barthian theology that was popular at that time in Europe.

As C.F. Hallencreutz remarked, "Tambaram 1938 became a heated missiological controversy. The thrust of Kramer's argument was disputed both in its theological implications and in its distinction between Christianity and other faiths".<sup>90</sup>

Despite the controversy it aroused, the conference at Madras had great influence on missionary thinking for several decades. In 1988, on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the Madras meeting, the World Council of Churches organized a consultation at Madras to evaluate the contribution of Kramer. While the consultation was very appreciative of Kramer's contribution at the Madras meeting, several at the consultation expressed doubts as to the relevance of his theology for today. At that time, Philip Potter, writing in the *Ecumenical Review*, was very appreciative of Kramer's insight about the primacy of biblical realism, but added, ". . .but the content of biblical realism ought to take into account the deep intent and scope of God's purpose for human beings in creation. A true doctrine of the sovereignty of God in creation, redemption and eschatological fulfillment must make room for an anthropology which allows for God to be acting in and through all persons who earnestly seek to be truly human. It is the good news of the humanity of God in Christ which makes exciting the dialogue between Gospel and culture".<sup>91</sup>

### **After Madras**

Madras was a milestone in the sense that it made very clear that carrying the Gospel to the non-Christian world was not simply a matter of practical concern (as Edinburgh thought) but a theological one.

After the Evanston Assembly in 1955, the World Council of Churches, launched three interrelated studies on: The Word of God and the living faiths of men; The Lordship of Christ over the church and the world; and Common Christian responsibility towards areas of rapid social change. Philip Potter pointed out that it was the third one, on the Christian responsibility towards areas of rapid social change, which brought out, during the following four years, the actual situation of the people in the third world who comprise about two thirds of the population of the world. It was in the course of this study that the issues of culture, religion, and social change became apparent and raised questions of how the peoples of the world could participate together in promoting human dignity, justice and peace. One place where this was

increasingly perceived and carried out was through the study centers on religion and society, particularly in Asia.<sup>92</sup>

At the third assembly of the World Council of Churches in New Delhi, P.D. Devanandan who spoke on "Called to Witness", raised the question of witness in a world of other faiths. Devanandan (1901-1962) was the Founder-Director of the Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and society in India. He was present at the International Missionary Council meeting in Madras. Kramer's book: *The Christian Message* meant for him- a personal spiritual experience almost amounting to a conversion from a vague Christian philosophy of religion to the deeper dimensions of ethics and eschatology of radical Christian faith.<sup>93</sup> He was, however, very much opposed to Kramer's negative approach to the non-Christian world and his rejection of the fulfillment theory.

At New Delhi, referring to the new ferment in other religions, Devanandan said, "There can be sociological and psychological explanations for this phenomenon of the renaissance of other religions. But if religious faith is to be regarded also in terms of response it would be difficult for Christians to deny that these deep, inner stirrings of the human spirit are in response to the creative activity of the Holy Spirit"<sup>94</sup> He pointed out:

At best, we only confess our inability to understand God's ways with us men: at worst, we must blame ourselves for our blindness in refusing to believe that God is equally concerned in the redemption of people other than us, who may not wholly agree with our understanding of God's being, and his purpose for the world of his making.<sup>95</sup>

A world renewed in Christ, the new creation, is the sum and substance of the message of the Christian witness, he said. He then posed the questions: Is the preaching of the Gospel directed to the total annihilation of all other religions than Christianity? Will religions as religions, and nations as nations, continue characteristically separate in the fullness of time when God would gather together into one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth, even in him? According to Devanandan, in the final gathering up of all that is of this world and of the next, we will not be able to distinguish the New from the Old. As to the fulfillment he said:

Christian faith distinguishes between the Gospel

proclamation of the fulfillment of God's promise of the Kingdom, and the hope in the fulfillment of religious faith, wherever it is found, that all sincere human striving to reach out to God will indeed find favor with him. Fulfillment in the second sense would mean progressive realization of a more or less continuous creative process in history which can be traced back to the past, discernible in the present, and finally completed in the future. But fulfillment in the former case would mean that, because the final end is so totally assured, the end is in reality a present fact. In salvation-history, to the discerning eye of faith, it is the eternal future that is fulfilled in the contemporary present, not the past perfected in the future. It is in this sense our Lord declared that he had come not to destroy but to fulfil.<sup>96</sup>

Is salvation-history only confined to the history of Israel and the church? M.M. Thomas pointed out that Devanandan certainly believed that salvation history covered all parts of humanity and that he was prepared to look for salvation history or the new creation in Christ even within renescent Hinduism and secular humanism.<sup>97</sup> God has a purpose in history and is working through it and Devanandan saw God working out His purpose in the renaissance and internal reformation going on in other religions. According to him, the Christian message of new creation in Christ ought to be addressed to the process of renaissance and reformation taking place in other religions. "If God's redemptive activity in Jesus Christ is a fact with which we should reckon in every human situation, it is not so much by total destruction that he manifests his power but by the radical renewal of what we cherish as valuable. That is why the Gospel we proclaim is the Good News of the Resurrection, the hope of the New Creation."<sup>98</sup>

At the New Delhi Assembly, the report of the section on witness mentioned that there were different opinions in the group about the proper understanding of the relation and response of people of other faiths to divine reality. This question was referred, for further investigation, to the study group on the 'Word of God and the living faiths of men'.

In 1967, the World Council of Churches held a consultation in Kandy, Sri Lanka on 'Christians in Dialogue with men of other faiths'. In the Kandy statement, dialogue was understood as an authentic style of

living in pluralistic milieu, which transcended simple co-existence. It meant "a positive effort to attain a deeper understanding of the truth through mutual awareness of one another's conviction and witness."<sup>99</sup> The Uppsala Assembly in 1968 in its report on Renewal in Mission spoke of the necessity for dialogue with people of other faiths, or no faith, arising out of the common humanity which we share with others. It stated:

The meeting with men of other faiths or of no faith must lead to dialogues. A Christian's dialogue with another implies neither a denial of the uniqueness of Christ, nor any loss of his own commitment to Christ, but rather that a genuinely Christian approach to others must be human, personal, relevant and humble. In dialogue we share our common humanity, its dignity and fallenness, and express our common concern for that humanity. It opens the possibility of sharing in new forms of community and common service. Each meets and challenges the other; witnessing from the depths of his existence to the ultimate concerns that come to expression in word and action. As Christians we believe that Christ speaks in this dialogue, revealing himself to those who do not know him and correcting the limited and distorted knowledge of those who do. Dialogue and proclamation are not the same. The one compliments the other in a total witness. But sometimes Christians are not able to engage either in open dialogue or proclamation. Witness is then a silent one of living the Christian life and suffering for Christ. **100**

While such discussions were taking place in the World Council of Churches, similar initiatives and encouraging developments were taking place in other centers, especially in the Roman Catholic Church and in the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA). More than half the world's population lives in Asia; the majority of them belong to Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam. Inter-religious and inter-cultural questions are crucial ecumenical issues for the churches in Asia. The EACC (later CCA), from the very beginning of its formation, was aware of the world of religions as a missionary frontier. But as the churches have grappled with the question of participation in nation building, development, and modernization, it has become increasingly clear that it is important that people of different religions not only talk together but also work together for justice and peace in the world. In the 1960s, EACC under

the leadership of D.T. Niles was very conscious that the being, the functions, and the forms of the church should be seen within the setting of Christian solidarity with all others in the larger human community. Community with people in recognition and realisation of their common humanity is the only true Context for meaningful dialogue and therefore of Christian mission. M.M. Thomas was only voicing the thinking of the Asian churches when he said:

One thing is absolutely clear. Participation in the struggle of Asian peoples for a fuller human life in state, society and culture, in a real partnership with men of other faiths and no faith, is the only context for realizing the true being of the Church and exercising Church's ministry and mission. Whether we speak of the evangelistic mission of proclaiming and in other ways of communicating the gospel of Jesus Christ, or of the meaning of Church's social service and prophetic ministry or of the worship and fellowship of the Christian congregation or of the larger unity of the Church, it has sense and makes sense only within this context of participation and partnership. Therefore the life and mission of the Church should be so patterned as to make such participation effective and responsible, and an expression of Christian discipleship.

101

In 1964, EACC undertook a study of 'Christian Community within Human Community'.

The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) was an event of great significance in the life of the Roman Catholic Church and in the ecumenical movement as a whole. The Council issued comprehensive and systematic statements dealing with the matters of theology and practice of mission. In this, the Dogmatic Constitution of the Church (Lumen Gentium 1964), the Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity (AD Gentes, 1965), and Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions (1965), are of special importance. In relation to the non-Christian religions, the Council said:

The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions. She has a high regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and doctrines which, although differing in many ways from her own

teaching, nevertheless often shed a ray of that truth which enlightens all men. Yet she proclaims and is in duty bound to proclaim without fail, Christ who is the way, the truth and the life (John 14.67). In him God reconciled all things to himself (2 Cor. 5:18-19), and in whom men find the fullness of their religious life.

The Church, therefore, urges her sons to enter with prudence and charity into discussion and collaboration with members of other religions. Let Christians, while witnessing to their own faith and way of life, acknowledge, preserve and encourage the spiritual and moral truths found among non-Christians, also their social life and culture.<sup>102</sup>

The Roman Catholic Church is much more open to dialogue with people of other faiths than the Protestants. The Declaration of the Second Vatican Council, and the writings of Roman Catholic theologians such as Karl Rahner on the subject, had widespread influence in the ecumenical movement as a whole.

### **Ajaltoun Conference 1970**

Since the conference at Uppsala, the World Council of Churches has treated dialogue with people of other faiths with serious concern. In August 1968, Stanley J. Samartha was appointed Associate Secretary in the Department of Studies in Mission and Evangelism. His primary responsibility was to pursue the study on the 'Word of God and the living faiths of men', and to encourage and coordinate the work of the Study Centers related to the Division of World Mission and Evangelism. At the initiative of Samartha, a consultation with adherents of other religions was held in March 1970 in Ajaltoun (Beirut). Its purpose was "to gather together the experience of bilateral conversations between Christians and men of other faiths, to experiment with a multilateral meeting, and see what could be learned for future relations between people of living faiths". Samartha speaks of the Ajaltoun meeting as a new beginning. "With this consultation, dialogue made a provocative entry into the agenda of the World Council of Churches and became a continuing ecumenical concern for the churches affiliated to the Council".<sup>103</sup> The Ajaltoun meeting brought together for the first time people of four different faiths - Hindus, Buddhists, Christians and Muslims - under the auspices of the WCC. It also brought together for

the first time Roman Catholic theologians to join Orthodox and Protestants to meet neighbors of other faiths.<sup>104</sup> Though the consultation was tentative and experimental in nature, it was recognized that something very new had been embarked upon and that what was experienced together was very positive and something to be carried forward urgently.<sup>105</sup>

David Jenkins, a British theologian and the Director of Humanum Studies of the World Council of Churches at the time was a participant at Ajaltoun consultation. He observed:

The pre-supposition of the Consultation on "Dialogue between Men of Living Faiths" at Ajaltoun was that a living commitment to a living faith within a particular religious tradition did not forbid dialogue on the grounds of disloyalty to the exclusive claims of that faith nor render dialogue impracticable because the object of the commitment was experienced so differently as to make dialogue impossible. The experience of the actual dialogues possible at Ajaltoun confirmed this pre-supposition.<sup>106</sup>

According to him, the questions of absoluteness, uniqueness, conversion, mission, evangelism, and a host of others have arisen, and will continue to arise. The pre-supposition, experience, and the conclusion of the Ajaltoun consultation was that whatever the views that had been expressed, the fact remained that men of commitment and faith in different religious traditions can and do find, by virtue of that commitment, that they share aspects (only) of a common beginning, a common situation and a common end. Jenkins made it clear that he was not saying that all religions truly arise from a common source, see the world in a similar way and have a manifest common aim., "The factual and primarily significant element is that men of living faiths can help one another to catch glimpses which hint that in their highly varied, incomplete and perfect ways they are to some extent drawing from a common source, living in a common world and seeking a common fulfillment, and that they do this through their very varied religious traditions and the varied and imperfect ways in which they seek to express the commitment required in response to that with which traditions are concerned".<sup>107</sup>

Jenkins stressed that dialogue must be concerned not only with

possibilities of common exploration but also with possibilities of common action. The dialogue needs to expand, not into a competition for the souls of people, but into a competition for the pooling of resources for the task of serving people and glorifying God. "We need to be together with all men of living faith and living concern for the sake of the world, so that unity of mankind and sustaining of mankind can be promoted, and for the sake of entering into the fullness of Christ, i.e., of discovering and being part of the realizing of all that is involved in Christ, the Son and the Word of God"<sup>108</sup> This is an urgent mission demanding a variety of forms of exploration, activity and sustenance. "But the object of mission is not primarily conversion to membership of the Christian church or acceptance of a specifically Christian commitment but a moving onwards into the possibilities of God which constitute man's future and his fulfillment".<sup>109</sup>

Samartha explained that one of the lessons which people of different faiths were learning was how much they were dependent on, and involved in, the on going history of one another. He said, "...our calling today is less to be the bearers of a particular "mission" and more to be participants in the total life of all multi-religious communities, to be a pilgrim people contentedly together in motion responding to the initiatives of God".<sup>110</sup> This sense of dependence and involvement calls for a new understanding of the nature and function of Christian communities in multi-religious societies. Samartha very rightly asked: Does Christianity have the resources to solve all the problems people face elsewhere, particularly when there is a crisis of faith in the Church itself?<sup>111</sup> Ajaltoun was a new theologizing experience for many and they looked forward to more of such experiences, partly because of a sense of incompleteness and mutual need, though not necessarily because of deficiency in one's own religious position. The thinking behind that being that the very adequacy and relevance of one's commitment called for opening oneself to new dimensions of thought and experience.

Following the Ajaltoun consultation a group of twenty three Christian theologians - Roman Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant -met together at Zurich in May 1970, to evaluate the Ajaltoun consultation and to see what lessons could be learned from such meetings for Christians in their continuing dialogue with people of other faiths.<sup>112</sup> The report of the consultation made clear the position of the World Council of Churches with regard to dialogue. With regard to the mission of the church and dialogue, the report pointed out that there were those Christians who

feared that dialogue with people of other faiths was a betrayal of mission; conversely, there were people of other faiths who suspected that dialogue was simply a new tool for mission. The report went on to say that there was an understanding of mission that neither betrayed the commitment of the Christians nor exploited the confidence and the reality of people of other faiths. Dialogue demands openness on both sides. It repudiates certain one-way patterns of mission in which those who speak and act in the name of Christ fail to listen to, and learn from, those to whom they are sent. Dialogue cannot either be a new tool for the old forms of mission which involve dominance, nor a dishonest means of getting into contact with a view to a conversion which does not take the other partner seriously. Nor can it be a betrayal of Christian mission. For dialogue between Christians and people of other faiths, being understood within the context of God's mission to all people, stems from love and is seeking the fruit of love. True love never only gives, it is also concerned always to receive. For love is a relationship and a power of mutual respect. It is concerned always with reality, the freedom and the fulfillment of the other.<sup>113</sup>

"Dialogue with People of Living Faith" was the theme for the Central Committee meeting of the World Council of Churches in Addis Ababa in January 1971. After extensive discussion, the Central Committee adopted "The Interim Policy Statement and Guidelines on Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies". It also established a separate sub-unit on Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies and appointed Stanley Samartha as Director. This action gave the concern for other religions an independent status, and a visible presence, among other sub-units in the Unit on Faith and Witness.

By 1970, there was an increasing awareness in the ecumenical movement that Christians, in today's increasingly pluralistic world, must go beyond considering people of other religions as objects of Christian mission to treating them as partners in a global community confronting urgent issues of peace, justice and the survival of humankind in the world. This was a decisive shift away from the position taken by Kramer at Madras. The dialogue program became a search for new relationships between people of different faiths and ideological convictions.

As mentioned earlier, the Bangkok Conference on 'Salvation Today' put great emphasis on the cultural identity of Christians and Christian communities. It emphatically stated that culture shapes the human voice

that answers the voice of Christ. It pointed out that the universality of the Christian message does not contradict its particularity. Christ has to be responded to in particular situations, and in a variety of ways. As the concerns for religions and cultures developed, the evangelical criticisms of the World Council of Churches also intensified. Many Evangelicals saw in the dialogue program of the World Council, a loss of missionary commitment and they feared that dialogue would lead to syncretism.

At the Nairobi Assembly, the program of dialogue with people of other faiths was considered by section III on Seeking Community: The Common Search of People of Various Faiths, Cultures and Ideologies.<sup>114</sup> In introducing the report, the moderator of the section, Metropolitan Paulos Mar Gregorios reminded the Assembly that Christians, even if united, would be a minority within humanity, and that the wider human community really did matter. The questions, therefore, for the Christians are, firstly, what in our faith makes it possible to say that God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, is working within the whole of creation and humanity? Secondly, what is the right relationship between Christians and people of other faiths and ideologies? And thirdly, with cultures interacting, how do we find a world in which all cultures learn to make a common response to the problems confronting humanity?

During the discussion that followed, several (mostly of evangelical persuasion from Europe) opposed the report and believed that it would be interpreted as spiritual compromise or opposition to the mission of the church. It was surprising that instead of centering on the main substance of the report, namely the need for a common search for community in a pluralistic global society, the debate was on questions such as: Does dialogue lead to syncretism? Does it compromise the uniqueness, supremacy and the finality of Christ? Does it betray Christian mission?

Some speakers from Asia defended the report. Russel Chandran (Church of South India), speaking in favor of the report, said that the search for human community with others and dialogue with them was not simply the consequence of human considerations of tolerance, religious harmony, and peace. On the contrary, it was deeply rooted in our confession of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and our commitment to the trinitarian faith. We have not yet fathomed the depths of the unsearchable riches of Christ and our knowledge of him must never be absolutized. In a genuine sense, our knowledge and experience of Christ

is enriched by the response of the people of other faiths. Witnessing to Christ is, therefore, a two-way movement of mutual learning and enrichment.<sup>115</sup> With regard to the danger of syncretism voiced by several, Lynn A. de Silva of Sri Lanka pointed out that dialogue, far from being a temptation to syncretism, is a safe-guard against it, because in dialogue we get to know one another's faith in depth. One's own faith is tested and refined and sharpened thereby. The real test of faith is faiths-in-relation. <sup>116</sup>

However, the mood of the Assembly was such that the objections were thought to be serious. The report was revised in the light of the criticisms raised and a preamble added. In the preamble it is said:

We are agreed that the Great Commission of Jesus Christ which asks us to go out into all the world and make disciples of all nations, and to baptize them in the triune Name, should not be abandoned or betrayed, disobeyed or compromised, neither should it be misused. Dialogue is both a matter of hearing and understanding the faith of others, and also of witnessing to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

We are all opposed to any form of syncretism, incipient, nascent or developed, if we mean by syncretism conscious or unconscious human attempts to create a new religion composed of elements taken from different religions.<sup>117</sup>

Speaking of starting points in the search for community, the report stated:

Many stressed that all people have been created by God in his image and that God loves all humanity. Many believed that in a world broken by sin it is the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ which provides the basis for the restoration of the creation to wholeness. Others would seek this basis for community in the trinitarian understanding of God. Still others find theological meaning in the fact that history has moved and is removing geographical and cultural barriers which once kept us isolated and so is moving us towards one interdependent humanity... It would appear, however, that in practice in particular situations men and women of various cultures, faiths, and

ideologies can enter into community together, although their own understandings of their motivations will vary.

The question was asked whether we can posit that Jesus Christ is at work among people of other faiths. Here opinions differed. Some stated as their conviction that Jesus Christ as Savior is not present in the other religions, although they accepted the idea of a natural knowledge of God. Others acknowledged the presence of the *logoi spermatikoi* (scattered seeds of truth) in other religions but stressed that only in Jesus Christ do we receive fullness of truth and life. Others gave first hand testimony that their own faith in Jesus Christ had been greatly deepened and strengthened through encountering him in dialogue with those of other faiths. The point was also made that the spirit works among people outside Israel and outside the Church, and that this spirit is one with the Father and the Son.<sup>118</sup>

The Assembly at Nairobi in 1975, failed to take a firm stand on many important issues. It was very indecisive and therefore failed to give clear directions for future work. Many from Asia, who lived and worked among people of other faiths were very disappointed with the discussions at Nairobi. They felt that it was a set-back for the development that had taken place since the Uppsala Assembly. Stanley Samartha noted, "While the representatives of churches gathered in Nairobi, had both the freedom and responsibility to raise questions fundamental to the integrity of the Christian faith, they took no notice of the considerable amount of work done from 1968 to 1978 - the Word of God studies, the various bilateral and multilateral meetings, and the serious theological reflections that had gone on, the reports of which were all available in the form of books and many articles".<sup>119</sup> It is important to state an observation made by a guest (a Hindu) present at the Assembly. He wrote:

The problems that threaten world community are not merely political and economic; they also arise from certain religious and spiritual attitudes. May I submit that it is the way that the gospel is presented that poses serious problems to world community, and not the gospel itself. It is the manner in which Jesus Christ is communicated that creates religious dissensions, and not Jesus Christ. It is the

exclusive and imperial attitude of some Christians that threatens the human community; it has even alienated its own young people in the Christian world. If the faith and integrity of other persons are not respected, human community can at best be only a dream.<sup>120</sup>

## **Beyond Nairobi**

Nairobi was definitely a set back, but it did not stop the ecumenical movement from its search for a wider human community. The sub-unit on Dialogue, under the leadership of Samartha, continued the search. A consultation was held in April 1977 at Chiang Mai in Thailand. A group of about eighty five Christians - Protestants, Orthodox and Catholic - from thirty six countries met to reflect on what it meant, theologically and ethically, for Christians to seek community in a common search with people of various faiths, cultures and ideologies in a world torn by tensions and conflicts. The consultation turned out to be a landmark "in the history of the ecumenical movement in its struggle to come to terms with people of other faiths in God's oikoumene".<sup>121</sup> It prepared a theological statement on dialogue and guidelines for dialogues. According to Samartha, Chiang Mai helped to overcome some of the pain and doubts after Nairobi and gave a certain direction to the continuing work of dialogue in community.<sup>122</sup>

One of the high-lights of the consultation were the Bible Studies. The title of the Bible study led by Kristen Stendahl (based on Acts 10: 11-11:18 and Ephesians 2:11-22) was : "It took a miracle to launch the mission to the Gentiles". Stendahl pointed out that the whole of the New Testament was written either within, or for, primarily Gentile congregations. Paul was the first to see that "the Jesus movement" was to be a Gentile movement. But it took divine intervention with various and divinely scheduled coincidences. Even more important, the regular timetable "of baptism plus the reception of the spirit (Acts 2:38) was revised, with the spirit coming first (in a second Pentecost" for the Gentiles), so that Peter was led to say, if they have received the spirit "just as we have", what could prevent us from baptizing them (Acts 10:47). According to Stendahl, the book of Acts describes the slowness and resistance of the church in responding to the new ways God is leading her to go beyond the confines to which one is accustomed. Ephesians 2:11-22 then reflects, in theological terms, on what was actually happening in the experience of the early church. It describes a new chapter in human history, namely, the overcoming of the hostility

between Jews and Gentiles, a destruction of the wall between religious divisions of human kind. The inherited division was overcome and the two were reconciled into one. Stendahl then made two important points:

1. The question of dialogue with people of other faiths was not in the minds of the biblical writers. Nevertheless, the new questions arising in new situations, for which there are no precedents, can be valid and important. A Christian theology of religion cannot be pieced together by direct biblical quotations. It is a new question.
2. The 'Cornelius' story shows that it is not easy for God to teach the church that He does not practice partiality. Let us not be jealous because He is generous.<sup>123</sup>

During the decade following Chiang Mai, a number of important developments took place in the life of the church. The Vatican brought out several substantial documents relating to the relation between Christians and people of other faiths. A number of programs in this area were undertaken by the CCA during the 1970s and 1980s. The World Council of Churches' Commission on World Mission and Evangelism issued an ecumenical statement on 'dialogue, witness and mission'. In preparation for the Canberra Assembly of the World Council of Churches, a dialogue consultation prepared a document on the work of the Holy Spirit in the world with special reference to people of other living faiths.<sup>124</sup>

The ecumenical discussion was not simply on dialogue with people of other faiths, but also included culture in general as the context for mission. The Bangkok conference on 'Salvation Today', had already raised this question sharply. The Assembly at Vancouver spoke of culture as the context for Christian mission. It was aware of the richness and variety of cultures and the crucial importance of culture. "Culture is what holds community together... It constitutes the collective memory of people and the collective heritage which will be handed down to generations still to come".<sup>125</sup>

### **Vancouver Assembly 1983, and Canberra Assembly 1991**

The sixth Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Vancouver in 1983 had as its main theme: Jesus Christ - the Life of the World. In discussing Christian witness in a divided world, the Assembly

recognized culture as the context for Christian witness. The Assembly report on 'Witnessing in a divided world' said. "Culture is what holds a community together, giving a common frame work of meaning. It is preserved in language, thought patterns, ways of life, attitudes and symbols and pre-suppositions. and is celebrated in art, music, drama, literature and the like. It constitutes collective memory of the people and the collective heritage which will be handed down to generations still to come".<sup>126</sup> While affirming and celebrating cultures as expressing the plural wonder of God's creation, the report also recognized aspects within each culture which deny life and oppress people. Hence the report suggested the need to look again at the whole issue of Christ and Culture in the present historical situation. It recommended that steps be taken for a theological understanding of culture. It said, "In the search for a theological understanding of culture we are working towards a new ecumenical agenda in which various cultural expressions of the Christian faith may be in conversation with each other". The report pointed out that in contemporary societies there is an evolution of a new culture due in part to modernization and technology. There is a search for a culture that will preserve human values and build community. Hence the need to reassess the role played by, in particular, secular and religious ideologies in the formation of culture, and the relationship between this process and the demands of the Gospel and our witness to it. The report affirmed that the Gospel message becomes a transforming power within the life of a community when it is expressed in the cultural forms in which the community understands itself.<sup>127</sup> Vancouver did not say anything about dialogue with people of other living faiths.

In between Vancouver and the next Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Canberra in 1991, a number of important discussions took place about Gospel and culture. There was the Commission for World Mission and Evangelism Conference in San Antonio in 1989. There was the Asian Mission Conference in Indonesia in the same year under the auspices of the Christian Conference of Asia and the WCC committee at Baar in 1990. At the Asian Mission Conference, Kim Yong-Bock of Korea in his keynote address pointed out that the most basic theological affirmation is that the peoples of Asia are the children of God. God the creator is God of the suffering and struggling peoples of Asia, no matter who they are in terms of religion, political ideology or cultural differences. In Asia, however, Christian churches have constricted Jesus Christ to exclude peoples of Asia from the category of the people of God.<sup>128</sup>

The World Council of Churches' consultation at Baar was the conclusion of a four year study undertaken by the sub-unit on Dialogue, entitled, "My Neighbor's Faith and Mine". The report of the consultation <sup>129</sup> states that our theological understanding of religious plurality begins with our faith in the one God who created all things, the living God, present and active in all creation from the beginning. He guides the nations through their traditions of wisdom and understanding. God's glory penetrates the whole creation. The consultation unambiguously stated that people at all times and in all places respond to the presence and activity of God among them, and have given their witness to their encounters with the living God. In this testimony they speak both of seeking and of having found salvation, or wholeness, or enlightenment, or divine guidance, or rest, or liberation. The consultation explained the plurality of religious traditions as the result of both the manifold ways in which God has revealed to peoples and nations, as well as the manifestation of the richness and diversity of human kind.<sup>130</sup> "We affirm that God has been present in their seeking and finding, that where there is truth and wisdom in their teachings, and love and holiness in their living, this, like any wisdom, insight, knowledge, understanding, love and holiness that is found among us, is the gift of the Holy Spirit. We also affirm that God is with them as they struggle along with us, for justice and liberation".<sup>131</sup> The report went on to say that since God is the creator and is active in the plurality of religions, it is inconceivable that God's saving activity could be confined to any one continent, cultural type, or groups of peoples. A refusal to take seriously the many and diverse religious testimonies to be found among the nations and peoples of the whole world amounts to disowning the biblical testimony to God as creator of all things and father of human kind. The spirit of God is at work in ways that pass human understanding and in places that to us are least expected. In entering into dialogues with others, Christians seek to discern the unsearchable riches of Christ and the way God deals with humanity. The consultation saw the realm of religious plurality not as an obstacle to overcome but as an opportunity for deepening our encounter with God and with our neighbors.

The consultation also pointed out that any affirmation of the positive qualities of wisdom, love, compassion, and spiritual insight in the world's religious traditions must also speak with honesty and with sadness of the human sin and folly that is present in all religious communities.<sup>132</sup> The consultation at Baar had a more positive approach to other religions than any other World Council of Churches'

consultation held before. It was a bold affirmation of God's universal work in the life of His creation.

In the Canberra Assembly of the Council in 1991, the question of Gospel and culture became a very controversial one. The occasion was the speech by Chung Hyun Kyung of Korea on the theme of the Assembly, 'Come, Holy Spirit - Renew the Whole Creation'. In her address, she invoked the presence of the spirits of Hagar, Uriah, Joan of Arc, the people who died during the crusades, the indigenous people of the earth, the Jewish people killed in the gas chambers in the holocaust, Mahatma Gandhi, Steve Biko, Martin Luther King Jr., the Liberator, our brother Jesus, tortured and killed on the cross and so on. "I come from Korea, the land of spirits full of Han", she said. "Han is resentment. Han is bitterness. Han is grief. Han is broken-heartedness and the raw energy for struggle for liberation. They are all over the place seeking the chance to make the wrong right. Therefore the living peoples' responsibility is to listen to the voices of the Han-ridden spirits and to participate in the spirit's work of making right whatever is wrong. These Han-ridden spirits in our people's history have been agents through whom the Holy Spirit has spoken her compassion and wisdom for life. Without hearing the cries of these spirits we cannot hear the voice of the Holy Spirit. These spirits are the icons of the Holy Spirit who became tangible and visible to us. Because of them we can feel, touch and taste the concrete bodily historical presence of the Holy Spirit in our midst.<sup>133</sup> Speaking of the image of the Holy Spirit from her Korean cultural background, she said:

For me the image of the Holy Spirit comes from the image of Kawn In. She is venerated as Goddess of Compassion and Wisdom by East Asian women's popular religiosity. She is a bodhisatva, enlightened being. She can go into nirvana any time she wants to, but refuses to go into nirvana by herself. Her compassion for all suffering beings make her stay in this world enabling other living beings to achieve enlightenment... She waits and waits until the whole universe, people, trees, birds, mountains, air, water, become enlightened. They can then go into nirvana together where they can live collectively in eternal wisdom and compassion. Perhaps this might also be a feminine image of Christ who is the first-born among us, one who goes before and brings others with her.<sup>134</sup>

Several at the Assembly, found Chung's address very disturbing. The Orthodox participants were alarmed at the presentation and said that some people tend to affirm with very great ease the presence of the Holy Spirit in many movements and developments without discernment. "We must guard against a tendency to substitute a "private" spirit, the spirit of the world or other spirits for the Holy Spirit who proceeds from the Father and rests in the Son. Our tradition is rich in respect for local and national cultures, but we find it impossible to invoke the spirits of "earth, air, water and sea creatures". Pneumatology is inseparable from Christology or from the doctrine of the Holy Trinity confessed by the church on the basis of divine revelation".<sup>135</sup>

Similarly the Evangelicals who were present in Canberra pointed out:

As the Assembly discussed the process of listening to the spirit at work in every culture, we caution with others, that discernment is required to identify the spirit as the spirit of Jesus Christ and thus develop criteria for and limits to theological diversity. We argued for a high Christology to serve as the only authentic Christian base for dialogue with persons of other living faiths... At present, there is insufficient clarity regarding the relationship between the confession of the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Savior according to the Scripture, the person and the work of the Holy Spirit, and legitimate concern which are part of the WCC agenda... This theological deficit not only conspires against the work of the WCC as a Christian witness but also increases the tensions among its member churches.<sup>136</sup>

### **The World Mission Conference, Salvador 1996: The Gospel in Diverse Cultures**

If there was a world missionary conference specifically on Gospel and Cultures, it was the world mission and evangelism conference of the World Council of Churches held in Salvador, Brazil from Nov. 24- Dec. 3, 1996. Its main theme was 'Called to One Hope: Gospel in Diverse Cultures'. There were five hundred and seventy four participants from churches, mission agencies and groups on the frontiers of mission coming from about hundred countries. It was a well-prepared conference and was the conclusion of a four-year study process in Gospel and

Cultures undertaken by the CWME. There were two plenary presentations on the main theme and two theme panels with four speakers each. The conference worked in four Sections: Authentic witness in each culture; Gospel and identity in community; Local congregations in pluralist societies; and Gospel and diverse expressions.<sup>137</sup>

The Conference report when it speaks of culture has a wide understanding of culture and refers to all aspects of human activity and belief including religion. There is no way of being human without participating in culture, it says, for it is through culture that identity is established. Language, thought forms, and expressions, are shaped by culture. The question of culture in the missionary movement in the past was discussed mainly in relation to the churches in the mission field. Musimbi R. A. Kanyoro of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Kenya pointed this out in her plenary presentation. After mentioning that Gospel and culture has been an issue of concern for the church since the beginning, she said,

Yet in missiological discussions a kind of dualistic thinking developed in which culture was for a long time simply seen as a concern of the South. Discussions about inculturation, indigenization and contextualization, wherever they took place, were aimed mainly at addressing issues and theologies of the former missionized churches. It is interesting for those of us who come from these churches to see the issues of culture now being brought to the forefront of global church discussion. Not only are we reminded of the various condemnations of our cultures through out history which stripped us of our very identity, but we vividly remember the WCC seventh assembly in Canberra (1991), where the key note address Prof. Chung Hyun Kyung of Korea sparked controversy".<sup>138</sup>

In the past, the Gospel had been identified with western culture and quite often the culture of the western missionary was imposed upon the converts. In many churches, the rite of baptism was seen as an act of separation of the baptized from her/his culture. K.M. George raised the same point when he said that in the reassertion of new cultural contexts for interpreting the Bible and doing theology, one can sense the search for a new time and space. The present time and space have been shaped

by a conquering and possessing civilization. Peoples of different cultures have been denied their own time and space, so essential for genuine growth and freedom. Facing up to this need is the missionary challenge of the new century.<sup>139</sup>

### **Shift in Missionary Theology**

One of the achievements of the Salvador Conference was that it recognized this challenge and brought the issue of culture to the forefront of the ecumenical discussion. Christopher Duraisingh sees a major shift in missionary thinking in Salvador. According to him it is a shift in mission thinking and practice from colonial to post-colonial and Euro-centric to polycentric.<sup>140</sup> It shows that churches around the world have reached a critical point in the movement from being more or less homogenous in faith, worship and life to a situation of theological and liturgical heterogeneity, rooted in a profound contentment to express Christian faith and witness in terms of particular local cultural idioms. At Salvador, "many participants felt that a dominant trend at the conference was resistance to articulating the Gospel in monolithic and homogenous formulation, which led to abstract, general and universal. Salvador held forth the practice of diversity, multiplicity and heterogeneity born out of Christian experience in concrete, specific and particular contexts".<sup>141</sup> Duraisingh explained that the term "polycentric" pointed not only to the reality of the existence of many churches around the world but also to a systematic principle of differentiation - diversity in life and witness, theological formulation, and dialogue and communion. It signified a refusal to accord epistemological privilege and adjudicating power to any single church, whatever its intellectual, economic or political strength, however rich its historical background and heritage.<sup>142</sup> This polycentric reality was clearly demonstrated by two theme panels - one on interpreting the Bible across cultures and the other on Evangelism in cultures.<sup>143</sup> The shift in its missionary theology is reflected in the conference's act of commitment.

We affirm that the spirit poured out on the day of Pentecost makes all cultures worthy vehicles of the love of God and that no culture is the exclusive norm for God's relationship with the humans. We also affirm dialogue as a vital mode of developing relationships, cultivating understanding and growing towards the unity to which all creation is called in Christ.<sup>144</sup>

The conference spoke of the creative activity of the Holy Spirit in all cultures. The triune God has not left His creation without a witness. The question was asked 'To what extent may other religions be acknowledged as being the expression of God's mercy and grace found in Christ?' For some, the people of other faiths experience salvation similar to what Christians experience salvation in Jesus Christ; for others, this was doubtful. The Section I Report points out, "The Christian faith affirms that God is one, and therefore the spirit present in the cultures and religions of humanity in mercy and judgement may be said to be none other than the Holy Spirit, that is, the Spirit of God who is eternally united to the Son and to the Father. Such convictions led some to ask whether the triune god is redemptively present even where the Gospel is not preached and Jesus Christ is not named as Savior and Lord"<sup>145</sup>

The conference also spoke of the ambiguity of culture. In each culture there are signs of the presence of the Holy Spirit, but sin has influenced all things human including culture. All cultures share in the brokenness of human life and there are life-denying and oppressive elements in cultures which run counter to the fundamental values of human relationships. God is present in cultures in both judgement and mercy in the midst of pain and suffering. The ultimate goal of God's activity in cultures is to bring about liberation, life and knowledge of God for all. Hence the vocation of the church to preach the Gospel.

## **Implications for Christian Mission**

### ***1. Authentic witness within each culture.***

This was the subject of discussion in Section I. The authentic witness is witness from within a culture. We are accustomed to treat culture as something fixed and outside the Gospel, an alien world into which the Christian mission goes - like a divine intervention -in order to confront and convert it by the proclamation of the Gospel. According to Duraisingh, "Witness from within" is the only mode of evangelism which corresponds to belief in a God who does not control human history from without but rather enters into it, suffers with it and transforms it by participating in it fully and really".<sup>146</sup> The section report made this very clear. It said, "It is the life of Jesus the incarnate, lived out in the realities of a particular context, that illuminates the very nature of God's way of salvation, the Gospel".<sup>147</sup> Hence the incarnation

of Jesus Christ, as testified to in the Gospel according to St. John (1:1-14) is basic to an understanding of the dynamic interaction between Gospel and cultures.<sup>148</sup>

In Gospel-culture encounter two things happen. Within the mutual interaction between Gospel and cultures, the Gospel functions as the new and inspiring principle, giving rise to the renewal of cultures through the transforming work of the spirit. Transformation means that the Gospel becomes incarnate in cultures in which it is proclaimed, just as the Word became incarnate in human flesh. Transformation brought about by the Gospel may be described as a lamp that gives light to all that is in the' house. In turn, culture illuminates the Gospel. The Gospel may be made more accessible and given a deeper expression through human cultural activities. "To affirm that cultures illuminate the gospel is to hold that culture, manifested in art and other forms of human activity, enlightens and enhances our understanding of the gospel".<sup>149</sup>

Witness from within implies neither displacement of the other nor elimination of all that is not Christian, but "enfleshment from within". It does not seek the disappearance of another culture or religion but rather a "community of communities" which does not do away with differences but "holds them together within the living structure of a differentiated unity". "This approach", says Duraisingh, "demands a culture of dialogue, a dialogue in which Christians may give an unequivocal witness to God's love in Jesus Christ".<sup>150</sup>

The conference also recognized the situations of unauthentic witness. This is where the Gospel is domesticated and made captive to serve the interest of the culture. Similarly there are situations where the Gospel has been abused for political purposes or to exploit people.

In authentic witness, honesty and openness are integral and vital. It must be culturally sensitive. Metropolitan Kiril of the Russian Orthodox Church, in his plenary address, complained about proselytism. He said that as soon as freedom for missionary work was allowed in Soviet Union, hordes of missionaries rushed in and behaved as though no local churches existed, and no Gospel was being proclaimed. In most cases the intention was not to preach Christ and the Gospel but to proselytize. "It is primarily an expression of cultural and ideological clashes, as newcomers try to impose their own culturally conditioned form of Christianity on other Christians".<sup>151</sup> Similar expressions of mission lead to unethical forms of coercion and proselytism which neither recognized

the integrity of the local churches nor were sensitive to local cultures. The Conference message pointed out that the catholicity of a church is enhanced by the quality of relationships it has with churches of other traditions and cultures. Competitiveness is the shortest way to undermine Christian mission. "Equally, aggressive evangelism which does not respect the culture of the people is unlikely to reflect effectively the gracious love of God and the challenge of the Gospel". The Conference committed itself to promote common witness and to renounce proselytism and all forms of mission which destroy the body of Christ.<sup>152</sup> According to K.M. George, the only way out of proselytism is to be consistently genuine and transparent.<sup>153</sup>

## ***2. Mission and structural dimensions of culture.***

This was the subject of consideration of Section II: 'Gospel and Identity in Community'. Culture is not only a vehicle of meaning but also a structure of symbols through which people express relationships of power and status. It gives identity to people and groups as well as it defines community. Salvador heard stories of how cultures were used to justify oppressive practices, to crush identities of groups, and how they provided powerful symbols for liberation. Among the questions addressed by Section II were: "What are the structural factors in societies that lead people to lose hope? What role does the search for local or narrow group identities and the possession of globalization play in promoting the fragmentation of human community on the one hand and the destruction of local cultural identities on the other? How many Christians witness to the gospel of Christ as the power of God which frees and unites? How may they proclaim the gospel as the relevant word of life to the public structures of society?"<sup>154</sup>

Power has often been misused to crush the identities of marginalized and excluded persons and groups. Marginalization through economic, political, cultural and religious forces is a reality in all societies. People are marginalized and their identities crushed because of, for example, their age, gender, caste, race, ethnicity. Speaking of African women, Kanyoro said:

For generations, African women have unquestionably obeyed all that society prescribes for them in the name of culture. Child marriages, female circumcision and the rites of passage from birth to death, whether useful or harmful, are imposed on African women simply because

it is "our culture". This might be taken to mean that what is culture is natural, good and unavoidable. Culture has silenced many women in Africa. It has hindered them from experiencing Jesus' liberating promise of abundant life for all (John 10:10). Cultural hermeneutics seeks to demystify the abstractness of "culture" by calling for analysis of and reflection on culture and its effects on people.<sup>155</sup>

Among those who experience mutilation of their identities are: Indigenous peoples, Africans in the diaspora, women, children, migrants, refugees, religious minorities and others.

The conference noted that increasingly tensions arise between different ethnic groups in a multicultural and multi-ethnic context. This sometimes lead to identity politics and violence with disastrous consequences. Identity politics exist when elements constituting one segment of a society are used as leverage for political power and socioeconomic advantage over other segments. In some instances, "violent struggles for separate states based on ethnic identity has led to a crisis in 'governability', challenging the viability of nation states".<sup>156</sup> Ethno-cultural definitions of nationality have led to the oppression of religious minority groups in many parts of the world. The churches have themselves given uncritical support to ethnic nationalism and violence. The conference also recognized that "globalization" was a serious threat to the identity of groups and peoples. The report of Section II says:

Economic globalization promotes a single economic community focussed on the accumulation of wealth - creating increasing poverty and unemployment and leading to the further marginalization of the poor and the exclusion of many. Economic globaliztion seeks to impose a single consumer identity throughout the whole world through corporate control, the media and technology. This process leads to a loss of self-identity. This form of homogenizing economic community which enriches the few and excludes many is contrary to the values of the Gospel.<sup>157</sup>

What is the mission of the church in such a situation? Kanyoro in her address mentioned that neither Gospel nor culture was good news until it liberated. The section report said that Christian mission proclaims

God's intention that all - with their languages and their cultural and spiritual heritages - should be affirmed as people of worth. Christian mission also has to do with identifying and even suffering with those whose identities have been denied. The liberating message of the Gospel is not only that the identity of each is affirmed but that all are taken beyond their own identity into the one new community of the spirit (Acts 4: 32-35).<sup>158</sup> Speaking of the response of the conference to ethnic violence and identity politics, Duraisingh said:

So the conference asked how Christian witness to the gospel can be an articulation of a counter-culture in the face of a culture of violence and the exclusion of those who are ethnically, racially or religiously different. If racism is a cultural construct for the subjugation of one group by another, how may the gospel challenge racial assumptions, which many Christians are often unaware that they hold?

Salvador high lighted inter-ethnic conflicts and identity politics as aspects of a new missionary imperative of the churches, and exhorted them to seek adequate symbolic representations of the 'other' in the light of the Christian faith and ways of being credible signs and instruments of God's purpose to bring about a common humanity in justice and peace.<sup>159</sup>

### ***3. Local Congregations in Pluralistic Societies.***

The presence of a plurality of cultures, the tensions and conflict arising out of the situation, and the transforming power of the Gospel are all felt and expressed at the local congregation. What are the ways to further the equipping and nurturing of local congregations for witness to the reconciling love of God in Christ? This was the concern of Section III. The report pointed out that for many people, acceptance or refusal to become members of a church was linked to positive or negative experiences in or with a local congregation, which could either be a stumbling block or an agent of transformation. What is the role of the local congregation in 'inculturating' the Gospel, making the Gospel meaningful in its own context and experiencing the inclusive nature of God's mission in the world?

Many local communities are unable to cope with the demands of

cultural pluralism. The ethnically and racially "other" is threatening, frightening, and not welcome. Duraisingh pointed out that strangers and aliens were key concepts in the biblical heritage. "The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you, you shall love the alien as yourself". (Lev. 19:34). Further, it was often the stranger who was God's messenger, bearing gifts from God. Kosuke Koyama argued that the Gospel is essentially "stranger centred", that an inclusive love for the other is at the heart of the biblical faith and is the defining characteristic of the early church's understanding of the person and work of Christ. Yet many churches are unable to deal creatively with strangers or engage in serious theological reflection on "the other" in the light of the Gospel.<sup>160</sup>

The section report suggested the need to explore the relation between worship and cultures. "In the church's liturgical life, culture and gospel interact and transform, illumine and challenge each other, shaping people for mission". In many congregations there exist power structures that diminish the place and influence of women, youth, children, so-called lower classes, ethnic and immigrant groups. It is essential for the church's renewal that steps be taken towards the empowerment of those people. Individuals and groups need to feel that they are fully respected as the persons they are and that their identity is affirmed - particularly when they are different from the majority in a local situation. In this the church is challenged as to whether its *raison d'être* is more its mission of sharing and living the Gospel, which includes serving the needs of humanity or rather preservation of its own identity. The report suggested that when distinct communities existed along racial or ethnic lines within a local congregation, they should be encouraged to cultivate together the multicultural richness of the church as a privilege, and as a gift of God. The emphasis should be on the local congregations becoming signs of God's inclusive love in the world.

Local congregations everywhere find themselves in religiously plural societies and are called to give account of the hope of a restored human community in Christ. Christian faith is communitarian at its core and it binds people in a community of love. How can we testify to this Gospel? It is important to build up creative and responsible relationships with people who belong to different religious traditions. This calls for dialogue with people of other faiths. Another issue is how do local congregations recognize that living in a dialogical relationship with people of other faiths is a fundamental point of our Christian service within the local community and a response to the command "to love

God and your neighbor as yourself'? The Section report highlighted the fact that genuine sharing could only take place when partners in dialogue encountered one another in a spirit of humility, honesty and mutual respect, ready to take risks in becoming exposed to one another and sharing one another's view of life, its meaning and purpose. The report made it clear that relevant education for mission at various levels of the church was crucial in order that Christians may indeed live and witness to the inclusive communities of love and reconciliation.<sup>161</sup>

#### ***4. One Gospel and Diverse Expressions.***

Today, the Gospel is lived out and witnessed to, and in, more diverse languages and cultures than ever before. In the ecumenical movement, many consider diversity not as a problem but as a gift from God for the church. But for others, this diversity is unsettling and they fear the danger of disunity and syncretism. Hence the question of unity that binds the diverse expressions of the Gospel and the limits to diversity has been a serious concern at Salvador. Section IV<sup>162</sup> approached this question from the point of view of interrelationship between catholicity and contextuality. Any authentic understanding of the Gospel is both contextual and catholic. The Gospel is contextual in that it is inevitably embodied in a particular culture; it is catholic in that it expresses the apostolic faith handed down from generation to generation within the communion of the churches in all places and all ages. The report mentioned that the early church manifested the catholicity of the faith through their diverse cultural resources and identities and through their communion with one another. According to Section IV, identity and context on the one hand, and communion and catholicity on the other are not opposed to each other but are complementary. Cultural contextuality in the Christian sense does not mean isolated and self-contained expression of the Gospel but affirmation of the gifts of each culture for the proclamation of the Gospel in communion with other contexts. Similarly, catholicity does not mean a universality that sweeps away particular identities, but is the expression of the fullness of truth that can be experienced in each particular context. Catholicity is not the destruction or overwhelming of the local; it is the local in communion. The section report mentions certain criteria for testing the appropriateness of the contextual expression of Gospel: faithfulness to God's self-disclosure in the totality of the Scriptures; commitment to a life-style and action in harmony with the reign of God; openness to the wisdom of the communion of saints across space and time; and relevance to the context.<sup>163</sup>

Dynamic interactions between the Gospel and cultures inevitably raise the question of syncretism. For many in the West, syncretism is a frightening word. Evangelicals often criticized the World Council of Churches for its syncretistic tendencies. But for many others, particularly from the South, syncretism is a normal, even essential part of rooting the Gospel in the particular cultures. They identify such creative process of syncretism within biblical corpus itself. Leonardo Boff, a Roman Catholic theologian in Latin America, finds syncretism as a normal step in any creative encounter of the Gospel in a local context. He writes:

The value of syncretism depends on the view point of the observer. If the observer sits in the privileged places within Catholicism - understanding it as a signed, sealed and delivered masterpiece - then he or she will consider syncretism to be a threat to be avoided at all costs. If, however, he or she is situated on a lower level, amid conflicts and challenges, in the midst of people who live their faith together with other religious expressions, on a level that understands Catholicism as a living reality and therefore open to other elements and the attempt to synthesize, then syncretism is seen as a normal and natural process. ... Our understanding of syncretism has come from those who have been afraid of it: the defenders of theological and institutional knowledge. **164**

Duraisingh explained that where a religion was reduced to a set of beliefs and fixed liturgical practices, so that the emphasis was on clearly identifiable content, syncretism is seen as an unhealthy amalgam of two or more desperate religions which denies the authentic content of one's own faith and practice. But those who see the dynamics of religion primarily as a process of "integration" between a religious tradition and its cultural ethos - which is itself dynamic and changing - accept syncretism and the process of integration, as a necessary element in the development of religion. Such a process has gone on throughout the history of Christianity.<sup>165</sup> It is important to recall here the call of M.M. Thomas at the Nairobi Assembly for a Christ-centered syncretism. Of course, not all integration is wholesome. "What is important is for the churches to commit themselves irrevocably to mutual accountability and critique, to open themselves to each other across cultures so that they may "share a rich diversity of the Christian faith; discover the unity that

binds these together; and affirm together the Christological center and Trinitarian source of our faith in all its varied expressions ".<sup>166</sup>

The emphasis of the Salvador Conference on the interrelationship between catholicity and contextuality is a very important one for our understanding of ecumenism and mission. Mission is people's corporate response to challenges of the Gospel in constant dialogue with the religious and cultural situations in which they live. Catholicity is not the destruction or overwhelming of the local. It is the local in communion. Ecumenism is not a kind of internationalism where 'local' is submerged under the 'international' and which speaks of 'center' and 'primacy' existing elsewhere. As Nathan Soderblom said at the Jerusalem Conference, the propagation of Christian fellowship creates its own centers. This was so in the history of the early church, and this should be so in our days; the nations, civilizations, and churches outside Western Christendom should not be treated as insignificant colonies of the confessions and institutions of Western Christendom. It is important to note that Salvador refused to accord epistemological privilege and adjudicating power to any single church, whatever its intellectual, economic, or political strength, and however rich its historical background and heritage.

## ENDNOTES

1. H.R. Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, New York, Harper & Row, 1975, p. 11.
2. T.R. Metcalf, *Aftermath of Revolt*, Princeton University Press, 1964, p.25.
3. Alexander Duff's speech at the General Assembly in Scotland in 1835, quoted by Lal Behari Day, *Recollections of Alexander Duff*, pp. 100-101.
4. T.V. Philip, *Krishna Mohan Banerjea*, Madras, CLS, 1982, p. 69.
5. In India, William Miller and A.G. Hogg of the Madras Christian College, J.N. Farquhar, S.K. Datta, and K.T. Paul of the Indian YMCA, Susil Rudra and C.F Andrews of St. Stephen College, Delhi, were some

of them.

6. Timothy Yates, *Op.cit.*, pp. 8-12.

7. World Missionary Conference, 1910, The Report of Commission IV: The Missionary Message in Relation to Non-Christian Religions, p. 6.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

9. World Missionary Conference 1910, The Report of Commission I: Carrying the Gospel to all the Non-Christian World, p. 6.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 13.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 136.

14. Alexander Duff, *India and Indian Missions*, pp. 25-29

15. The Report of Commission I, p. 42.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 42.

17. The Report of Commission IV, p. 53.

18. *Ibid.*, p. 52.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 53.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 54.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 95.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 95.

23. *Ibid.* p. 97

24. *Ibid.*, p. 177

25. *Ibid.*, p. 181 In 1913 Farquhar published his famous book: *Crown of Hinduism*. It was Krishna Mohan Banerjea of Calcutta who in 1881 first developed a theory of the relation between Christianity and Hinduism. He points out that the biblical doctrine of salvation by the sacrifice of Christ finds a remarkable counterpart in the Vedic understanding of salvation by the self-sacrifice of Prajapati. Then he shows that Jesus, Jesus alone fulfils what Prajapati stood for in the primitive Vedic tradition and Jesus is the true Prajapati. Just as the Jewish Christians argued for a historical continuity between Israel and the Christian church, Krishna Mohan argues for a historical continuity between Vedic Hinduism and Christianity in India. (See T.V. Philip, *Krishna Mohan, Banerjea*, pp. 116-125).

26. The report of Commission IV, p. 326.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 293.

28. *IRM* vol. 1 (1912), p. 91

29. *IRM* vol. 5, no. 18 (1916), p. 219.

30. *IRM* vol.3, no. 10 (1914), pp. 247-248.

31. *IRM* vol. 4, no. 14 (1915), pp. 319-320.

32. *IRM* vol. 3, no.7, (1913), pp. 521-528, quoted in Timothy Yates, *Op.cit.*, p.96.

33. Timothy Yates, *Op.cit.*, p. 97

34. *Report of The Jerusalem Meeting*, Vol. III, pp. 144-146.

35. Basil Mathews, *Road to the City of God*, New York, Double Day, Doran & Company, 1929, p. 20.

36. *Ibid.*, pp. 211-22.

37. *Report of The Jerusalem Meeting*, Vol. I, p. 273.

38. Basil Mathews, *Op.cit.*, p.31.

39. *Report of the Jerusalem Meeting*, Vol. I, pp. 490-494.

40. *Ibid.*.

41. *Re-thinking Missions: A Layman's Inquiry After One Hundred Years*, New York, Harper & Brothers, 1932. H. Kramer, *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian, World*, London, The Edinburgh House Press, 1938.

42. Timothy Yates, *Op.cit.*, pp. 92-93.

43 *Re-thinking Missions*, p. 326.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 44.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 327.

46. Archibald C. Barker, *Christian Missions and a New World Culture*, New York, Willett, Clark & Company, 1934.

47. *Ibid.*, p.x.

48. *Ibid.*, p. 291.

49. *Ibid.*, p. 294.

50. *Ibid.*, p. 308.

51. *Ibid.*, p.300.

52. *Ibid.*, p. 315.

53. *International Missionary Council Meeting at Tambaram, Madras, December 12-29, 1938*, London, Oxford University Press, 1939, vol. 1: The Authority of Faith. Vol. 1 contains the findings of the Conference on The Faith by which the Church Lives (section 1 report) and The Witness of the Church in Relation to the Non-Christian Religions (section v report)..

54. Kramer, *Op.cit.*, p.v.

55. The Authority of Faith, p. IX.

56. Kramer, *Op.cit.*, p.2.

57. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

58. *Ibid.*, pp. 59-60.

59. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

60. *Ibid.*, p. 70.

61. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

62. *Ibid.*, p. 70.

63. *Ibid.*, p. 61.

64. *Ibid.*, p. 62

65. *Ibid.*, p. 63

66. *Ibid.*, p. 111.

67. See Chapter 4.

68. *Ibid.*, p. 112.

69. *Ibid.*, pp. 113-114.

70. *Ibid.*, pp. 284 - 286.

71. *Ibid.*, pp. 113-114.

72. Hendrik Kramer, *Why Christianity of All Religions ?*, London, Lutterworth Press, 1962, pp. 95-96.

73. *Ibid.*, p. 95.

74. Kramer, *Christian Message in a non-Christian World*, p.128.

75. *Ibid.*, p. 129.

76. Timothy Yates, *Op.cit.* p. 47.

77. *The Authority of Faith*, p.142.

78. *Ibid.*, p. 40.

79. *Ibid.*, pp. 91-92.

80. *Ibid.*, p. 157.

81. *Ibid.*, p. 157-158.

82. *Ibid.*, p. 158

83. *Ibid.*, p. 174.

84. *Ibid.*, pp. 103-106

85. *Ibid.*, p. 125.

86. *Ibid.*, p.211

87. *Ibid.*, p. 201.

88. Peter Harrison, *Religion and the Religious in the English Enlightenment*, Cambridge University Press, 1990, p. 8. He refers to Calvin's *Institute of Religions*.

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90. S.J. Samartha (ed.), *Living Faiths and the Ecumenical Movement*, Geneva. WCC, 1971, p. 59.

91. *Ecumenical Review*. vol. 41, no. 1, January 1989, p. 10.

92. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

93. M.M. Thomas, *The Christian Response to the Asian Revolution*, Lucknow, Lucknow Publishing House, 1967, pp. 99-100.

94. *Ecumenical Review*, vol. 14, no. 2, January 1962, p.160.

95. *Ibid.*, p. 160.

96. *Ibid.*, p. 163.

97. M.M. Thomas. *Op.cit.*, p. 101.

98. *Ecumenical Review*, January 1962, p. 162.

99. CF. Hallencreutz in *Living Faiths and the Ecumenical Movement*, *Op.cit.*, p.66.

100. *The Uppsala Report*, *Op.cit.*, p.29.

101. M.M. Thomas, *Op.cit.*, p. 104.

102. Austin Flannery (ed.), *Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, Vatican II: The Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Documents*, revised edition 1988, pp. 738-742.

103. Stanley J. Samartha, *Between Two Cultures*, Geneva, WCC Publication, 1996, p.49.

104. *Ibid.* p. 49.

105. Samartha (ed.), *Living Faiths and, the Ecumenical Movement*, p. 78.

106. *Ibid.*, p. 109.

107. *Ibid.*, pp.110-111.

108. *Ibid.*, p. 116.

109. *Ibid.*, p. 117.

110. *Ibid.*, p.105.

111. *Ibid.*, p. 107.

112. For the report of the Zurich Consultation, see *IRM. Vol. LIX, no.236, October 1970.* also *Living Faiths*, Ch. III.

113. *Living Faiths*, p. 38.

114. *Breaking Barriers, Op.cit.*, pp. 73-85.

115. *Ibid.*, p. 71.

116. *Ibid.*, p. 72.

117. *Ibid.*, p. 73.

118. *Ibid.*, p. 76.

119. *Between Two Cultures, Op.cit.*, p. 106.

120. *Ibid.*, pp.107-108.

121. *Ibid.*, p. 129.

122. See S.J. Samartha (ed.), *Faith in the Midst of Faiths : Reflections on Dialogue in Community*, Geneva, WCC, 1977

123. *Between Two Cultures, Op.cit.*, pp. 119.120.

124. *Ibid.*, p. 128.

125. David Gill (ed.), *Gathered For Life (Official Report of the VIth Assembly)*. Geneva WCC, 1983, p.32.

126. *Ibid.*, p.32

127. *Ibid.*, pp. 32 -33.

128. *Peoples of Asia, People of God*, Report of the Asian Mission Conference, 1989, Christian Conference of Asia. 1990, pp.12-13.

129. Michael Kinnamon and Brian B. Cope(eds.), *The Ecumenical Movement, An Anthology of Key Texts and Voices*, Geneva, WCC publication, 1997, pp. 417-420.

130. It is in a similar way, the pagan philosopher Celsus, in the second century, argued to reconcile unity and plurality.

131. *Ibid* p.418.

132. Michael Kinnamon and Brian Cope (eds.), *Op.cit.*, p. 418.

133. *Ibid.* p.232.

134. *Ibid.*, pp. 231-237.

135. *Ibid.*, p. 238.

136. *Ibid.*, p. 238.

137. For the official report of the Conference see, Christopher Duraisingh (ed.), *Called to One Hope: The Gospel in Diverse Cultures*, Geneva, WCC publications, 1998.

138. *Ibid.*, p. 102.

139. *Ibid.*, p. 143.

140. *Ibid.*, p. 194.

141. *Ibid.*, p. 194.

142. *Ibid.*, p. 195.

143. *Ibid.*. p. 195.

144. *Ibid.*, p. 27.

145. *Ibid.*, p. 33.

146. *Ibid.*, pp. 103-104.

147. *Ibid.*, p. 34

148 *Ibid.*, p. 34

149. *Ibid.*,p. 35.

150. *Ibid.*, p. 205.

151. *Ibid.*, pp. 90-92.

152. *Ibid.*, p. 27.

153. *Ibid.*, p. 140

154. *Ibid.*, p. xi.

155. *Ibid.*, p. 104.

156. *Ibid.*, p.45 - 46.

157. *Ibid.*, p. 40.

158. *Ibid.*, p. 41.

159. *Ibid.*, pp. 205-206.

160. *Ibid* p.206

161. *Ibid.*, p. 64.

162. *Ibid.*, pp. 64-70

163. *Ibid.*, p. 67.

164. Quoted by Christopher Duraisingh, *Ibid.*, p. 209.

165. *Ibid.*, p. 209.

166. *Ibid.*, p. 210.

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# **Edinburgh to Salvador: Twentieth Century Ecumenical Missiology by T.V. Philip**

T. V. Philip, born in India and a lay member of the Mar Thoma Church, has worked and taught in India, Europe, USA and Australia. He is a church historian, and a former Professor at the United Theological College, Bangalore, India. This book was published jointly by CSS and ISPCK, 1999, Kashmere Gate, Delhi, India. This material was prepared for Religion Online by Ted and Winnie Brock.

## **Appendix: Mission and Evangelism -- An Ecumenical Affirmation**

[This is the most important and comprehensive statement on mission made in 1982 by the World Council of Churches, after lengthy discussions with churches all over the world.]

### **Preface**

The biblical promise of a new earth and a new heaven where love, peace and justice will prevail (Ps. 85: 7-13; Isa. 32: 17-18, 65: 17-25 and Rev. 21: 1-2) invites our actions as Christians in history. The contrast of that vision with the reality of today reveals the monstrosity of human sin, the evil unleashed by the rejection of God's liberating will for humankind. Sin, alienating persons from God, neighbor and nature, is found both in individual and corporate forms, both in slavery of the human will and in social, political and economic structures of domination and dependence.

The Church is sent into the world to call people and nations to repentance, to announce forgiveness of sin and a new beginning in relations with God and with neighbors through Jesus Christ. This evangelistic calling has a new urgency today.

In a world where the number of people who have no opportunity to

know the story of Jesus is growing steadily, how necessary it is to multiply the witnessing vocation of the church!

In a world where the majority of those who do not know Jesus are the poor of the earth, those to whom he promised the kingdom of God, how essential is to share with them the Good News of that kingdom!

In a world where people are struggling for justice, freedom and liberation, often without the realization of their hopes, how important it is to announce that God's kingdom is promised to them!

In a world where the marginalized and the drop outs of affluent society search desperately for comfort and identity in drugs or esoteric cults, how imperative it is to announce that he has come so that all may have life and may have it in all fullness (John 10: 10)!

In a world where so many find little meaning, except in the relative security of their affluence, how necessary it is to hear once again Jesus' invitation to discipleship, service and risk!

In a world where so many Christians are nominal in their commitment to Jesus Christ, how necessary it is to call them again to the fervor of their first love!

In a world where wars and rumors of war jeopardize the present and future of humankind, where an enormous part of natural resources and people are consumed in the arms race, how cruel it is to call the peacemakers blessed, convinced that God in Christ has broken all barriers and has reconciled the world to himself (Eph. 2:14; II Cor. 5:19)!

This ecumenical affirmation is a challenge which the churches extend to each other to announce that God reigns, and that there is hope for a future when God will "unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth" (Eph.1:10). Jesus is "the first and last, and the Living One" (Rev. 1:17-18), who "is coming soon" (Rev. 22: 12), who "makes all things new" (Rev. 21:5).

## **The Call to Mission**

1. The present ecumenical movement came into being out of the

conviction of the churches that the division of Christians is a scandal and an impediment to the witness of the Church. There is a growing awareness among the churches today of the inextricable relationship between Christian unity and missionary calling, between ecumenism and evangelization. "Evangelization is the test of our ecumenical vocation." (Philip Potter's speech to the Roman Catholic Synod of Bishops, Rome, 1974.)

As "a fellowship of churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Savior, according to the Scriptures, and therefore seek to fulfil together their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit", (Constitution of the World Council of Churches.) the rallying point of the World Council of Churches is the common confession of Jesus Christ. The saving ministry of the Son is understood within the action of the Holy Trinity; it was the Father who in the power of the Spirit sent Jesus Christ the Son of God incarnate, the Savior of the world. The churches of the WCC are on a pilgrimage towards unity under the missionary vision of John 17:21, "that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us, that the world may believe that thou hast sent me". (Constitution of the Conference on World Mission and Evangelism.)

2. Already in the Old Testament the people of Israel were looking forward to the day of peace where God's justice will prevail (Isa. 11: 1-9). Jesus came into that tradition announcing that the kingdom of God was at hand (Mark 1:15), that in him the reality of the kingdom was present (Luke 4:15-21). God was offering this new justice to the children, to the poor, to all who labor and are heavy laden, to all those who will repent and will follow Jesus. The early Church confessed Jesus as Lord, as the highest authority at whose name every knee shall bow, who in the cross and in the resurrection has liberated in this world the power of sacrificial love.

3. Christ sent the disciples with the words: "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you" (John 20: 21). The disciples of Jesus were personal witnesses of the risen Christ (1 John 1: 2-3). As such they were sent - commissioned apostles to the world. Based on their testimony which is preserved in the New Testament and in the life of the Church, the Church has as one constitutive mark its being apostolic, its being sent into the world. God in Christ has equipped the Church with all gifts of the Spirit necessary for its witness. "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem,

and in all Judaea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1: 8).

4. The book of Acts tells the story of the expansion of the early Church as it fulfils its missionary vocation. The Holy Spirit came upon that small Jerusalem community on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2: 1-39), in order that through them and through others who were to believe in Christ through their word (John 17: 20), the world may be healed and redeemed.

The early Church witnessed to its Risen Lord in a variety of ways, most specially in the style of life of its members. "And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved" (Acts 2: 46-47). Through the persecutions suffered by the early Christians, the word spread spontaneously: "Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word" (Acts 8:4). The apostles then came to confirm the faith of those who had accepted the Word of God (Acts 8: 14-17). At other times, the word spread through more explicit and purposeful ministries. The church in Antioch organized the first missionary trip. Barnabas and Paul were sent by the church in response to the Holy Spirit (Acts 13: 1-4). Time and time again, the church was surprised by God's calling to face entirely new missionary situations (Acts 8: 26; 10: 17; 16: 9-10).

5. Jesus Christ was in himself the complete revelation of God's love, manifested in justice and forgiveness through all aspects of his earthly life. He completed the work of the Father. "My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work" (John 4:34). In his obedience to the Father's will, in his love for humanity, he used many ways to reveal God's love to the world: forgiving, healing, casting out demons, teaching, proclaiming, denouncing, testifying in courts, finally surrendering his life. The Church today has the same freedom to develop its mission, to respond to changing situations and circumstances. It is sent into the world, participating in that flow of love from God the Father. In that mission of love (Matt. 22:37) through all aspects of its life, the Church endeavors to witness to the full realization of God's kingdom in Jesus Christ. The Church is called, like John the Baptist, to point towards the "lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

### **The Call to Proclamation and Witness**

6. The mission of the Church ensues from the nature of the Church as the Body of Christ, sharing in the ministry of Christ as Mediator between God and His Creation. This mission of mediation in Christ involves two integrally related movements - one from God to Creation, and the other from Creation to God. The Church manifests God's love for the world in Christ - through word and deed, in identification with all humanity, in loving service and joyful proclamation; the Church, in that same identification with all humanity, lifts up to God its pain and suffering, hope and aspiration, joy and thanksgiving in intercessory prayer and eucharistic worship. Any imbalance affects our ministry and mission in the world.

Only a Church fully aware of how people in the world live and feel and think can adequately fulfil either aspect of this mediatory mission. It is at this point that the Church recognizes the validity and significance of the ministry of others to the Church, in order that the Church may better understand and be in closer solidarity with the world, knowing and sharing its pains and yearnings. Only by responding attentively to others can we remove our ignorance and misunderstanding of others, and be better able to minister to them.

At the very heart of the Church's vocation in the world is the proclamation of the kingdom of God inaugurated in Jesus the Lord, crucified and risen. Through its internal life of eucharistic worship, thanksgiving, intercessory prayer, through planning for mission and evangelism, through a daily lifestyle of solidarity with the poor, through advocacy even to confrontation with the powers that oppress human beings, the churches are trying to fulfil this evangelistic vocation.

7. The starting point of our proclamation is Christ and Christ crucified. "We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles" (1 Cor. 1: 23). The Good News handed on to the Church is that God's grace was in Jesus Christ, who "though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich" (2 Cor. 8: 9).

Following human wisdom, the wise men from the Orient who were looking for the child went to the palace of King Herod. They did not know that there was no place for him in the inn" and he was born in a manger, poor among the poor. He even went so far in his identification with the poverty of humankind that his family was obliged to take the

route of political refugee to Egypt. He was raised as a worker, came proclaiming God's caring for the poor, announced blessedness for them, sided with the underprivileged, confronted the powerful and went to the cross to open up a new life for humankind. As his disciples, we announce his solidarity with all the downtrodden and marginalized. Those who are considered to be nothing are precious in God's eyes (1 Cor. 26-31). To believe in Jesus the King is to accept his undeserved grace and enter with him into the Kingdom, taking sides with the poor struggling to overcome poverty. Both those who announce Jesus as the servant king and those who accept this announcement and respond to it are invited to enter with him daily in identification and participation with the poor of the earth.

With the Apostle Paul and all Christian churches, we confess Christ Jesus, "who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on the cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:6-11).

8. But Christ's identification with humanity went even more deeply, and while nailed on the cross accused as a political criminal, he took upon himself the guilt even of those who crucified him. "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23: 34). The Christian confession reads, "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor. 5: 21). The cross is the place of the decisive battle between the powers of evil and the love of God. It uncovers the lostness of the world, the magnitude of human sinfulness, the tragedy of human alienation. The total self-surrendering of Christ reveals the immeasurable depth of God's love for the world (John 3:16).

On this same cross, Jesus was glorified. Here God the Father glorified the Son of man, and in so doing confirmed Jesus as the Son of God (John 13: 31). "The early Christians used many analogies to describe what they had experienced and what they believed had happened. The most striking picture is that of a sacrificed lamb, slaughtered but yet living, sharing the throne, which symbolized the heart of all power and

sovereignty, with the living God himself." (*Your Kingdom Come*, p. 210.)

It is this Jesus that the Church proclaims as the very life of the world because on the cross he gave his own life for all that all may live. In him misery, sin and death are defeated once forever. They cannot be accepted as having final power over human life. In him there is abundant life, life eternal. The Church proclaims Jesus, risen from the dead. Through the resurrection, God vindicates Jesus, and opens up a new period of missionary obedience until he comes again (Acts 1:11). The power of the risen and crucified Christ is now released. It is the new birth to a new life, because as he took our predicament on the cross, he also took us into a new life in his resurrection. "When anyone is united to Christ, there is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come" (2 Cor.5:17).

Evangelism calls people to look towards that Jesus and commit their life to him, to enter into the kingdom whose king has come in the powerless child of Bethlehem, in the murdered one on the cross.

## **Ecumenical Convictions**

9. In the ecumenical discussions and experience, churches with their diverse confessions and traditions and in their various expressions as parishes, monastic communities, religious orders, etc., have learned to recognize each other as participants in the one worldwide missionary movement. Thus, together, they can affirm an ecumenical perception of Christian mission expressed in the following convictions under which they covenant to work for the kingdom of God.

### *1. Conversion*

10. The proclamation of the Gospel includes an invitation to recognize and accept in a personal decision the saving lordship of Christ. It is the announcement of a personal encounter, mediated by the Holy Spirit, with the living Christ, receiving his forgiveness and making a personal acceptance of the call to discipleship and a life of service. God addresses himself specifically to each of his children, as well as to the whole human race. Each person is entitled to hear the Good News. Many social forces today press for conformity and passivity. Masses of poor people have been deprived of their right to decide about their lives and the life of their society. While anonymity and marginalization seem

to reduce the possibilities for personal decisions to a minimum, God as Father knows each one of his hidden children and calls each of them to make a fundamental personal act of allegiance to him and his kingdom in the fellowship of his people.

11. While the basic experience of conversion is the same, the awareness of an encounter with God revealed in Christ, the concrete occasion of this experience and the actual shape of the same differs in terms of our personal situation. The calling is to specific changes, to renounce evidences of the domination of sin in our lives and to accept responsibilities in terms of God's love for our neighbor. John the Baptist said very specifically to the soldiers what they should do; Jesus did not hesitate to indicate to the young ruler that his wealth was the obstacle to his discipleship.

Conversion happens in the midst of our historical reality and incorporates the totality of our life, because God's love is concerned with that totality. Jesus' call is an invitation to follow him joyfully, to participate in his servant body, to share with him in the struggle to overcome sin, poverty and death.

12. The importance of this decision is highlighted by the fact that God himself through his Holy Spirit helps the acceptance of his offering of fellowship. The New Testament calls this a new birth (John 3:3). It is also called conversion, metanoia, total transformation of our attitudes and styles of life. Conversion as a dynamic and ongoing process "involves a turning from and a turning to. It always demands reconciliation, a new relationship both with God and with others. It involves leaving our old security behind (Matt. 16: 24) and putting ourselves at risk in a life of faith". (*Your Kingdom Come*, p. 196.) It is "conversion from a life characterized by sin, separation from God, submission to evil and the unfulfilled potential of God's image, to a new life characterized by the forgiveness of sins, obedience to the commands of God, renewed fellowship with God in Trinity, growth in the restoration of the divine image and realization ... of love of Christ (*Confessing Christ Today*, Reports of Groups at a Consultation of Orthodox Theologians, p. 8.)

The call to conversion, as a call to repentance and obedience, should also be addressed to nations, groups and families. To proclaim the need to change from war to peace, from injustice to justice, from racism to solidarity, from hate to love is a witness rendered to Jesus Christ and to

his kingdom. The prophets of the Old Testament addressed themselves constantly to the collective conscience of the people of Israel calling the rulers and the people to repentance and to renewal of the covenant.

13. Many of those who are attracted to Christ are put off by what they see in the life of the churches as well as in individual Christians. How many of the millions of people in the world who are not confessing Jesus Christ have rejected him because of what they saw in the lives of Christians! Thus the call to conversion should begin with the repentance of those who do the calling, who issue the invitation. Baptism in itself is a unique act, the covenant that Christians no longer belong to themselves but have been bought forever with the blood of Christ and belong to God. But the experience of baptism should be constantly re-enacted by daily dying with Christ to sin, to themselves and to the world and rising again with him into the servant body of Christ to become a blessing for the surrounding community.

The experience of conversion gives meaning to people in all stages of life, endurance to resist oppression, and assurance that even death has no final power over human life because God in Christ has already taken our life with him, a life that is "hidden with Christ in God". (Col.3:3)

## *2.The Gospel to all Realms of Life*

14. In the Bible, religious life was never limited to the temple or isolated from daily life (Hos. 6:4-6; Isa. 58: 6-7). The teaching of Jesus on the kingdom of God is a clear reference to God's loving lordship over all human history. We cannot limit our witness to supposedly private area of life. The lordship of Christ is to be proclaimed to all realms of life. In the Great Commission, Jesus said to his disciples: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you. And lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age". (Matt. 28:19-20). The Good News of the kingdom is a challenge to the structures of society (Eph. 3: 9-10; 6:12) as well as a call to individuals to repent. "If salvation from sin through divine forgiveness is to be truly and fully personal, it must express itself in the renewal of these relations and structures. Such renewal is not merely a consequence but an essential element of the conversion of the whole human beings".(*Breaking Barriers*, p. 233.)

15. "The Evangelistic Witness is directed towards all of the *ktisis* (creation) which groans and travails in search of adoption and redemption ... The transfiguring power of the Holy Trinity is meant to reach into every nook and cranny of our national life... The Evangelistic Witness will also speak to the structures of this world; economic, political, and societal institutions... We must re-learn the patristic lesson that the Church is the mouth and voice of the poor and the oppressed in the presence of the powers that be. In our own way we must learn once again 'how to speak to the ear of the King', on the the people's behalf... Christ was sent for no lessor purpose than bringing the world into the life of God."(*Confessing Christ Today, op. cit.*, pp. 10 and 3.)

16. In the fulfillment of its vocation, the Church is called to announce Good News in Jesus Christ, forgiveness, hope, a new heaven and a new earth; to denounce powers and principalities, sin and injustice; to console the widows and orphans, healing, restoring the brokenhearted; and to celebrate life in the midst of death. In carrying out these tasks, churches may meet limitations, constraints, even persecution from prevailing powers which pretend to have final authority over the life and destiny of people.

17. In some countries there is pressure to limit religion to the private life of the believer - to assert that freedom to believe should be enough. The Christian faith challenges that assumption. The Church claims the right and the duty to exist publicly - visibly - and to address itself openly to issues of human concern. "Confessing Christ today means that the Spirit makes us struggle with.., sin and forgiveness, power and powerlessness, exploitation and misery, the universal search for identity, the widespread loss of Christian motivation, and the spiritual longings of those who have not heard Christ's name. It means that we are in communion with the prophets who announced God's will and promise for humankind and society, with the martyrs who sealed their confession with suffering and death, and also with the doubtful who can only whisper their confession of the Name."(*Breaking Barriers*, p. 48.)

18. The realm of science and technology deserves particular attention today. The everyday life of most children, women and men, whether rich or poor, is affected by the avalanche of scientific discoveries. Pharmaceutical science has revolutionized sexual behavior. Increasingly sophisticated computers solve problems in seconds for which formerly a whole lifetime was needed; at the same time they become a means of invading the privacy of millions of people. Nuclear power threatens the

survival of life on this planet, while at the same time it provides a new source of energy. Biological research stands at the awesome frontier of interference with the genetic code which could - for better or for worse - change the whole human species. Scientists are, therefore, seeking ethical guidance. Behind the questions as to right or wrong decisions and attitudes, however, there are ultimate theological questions: what is the meaning of human existence? the goal of history? the true reality within and beyond what can be tested and quantified empirically? The ethical questions arise out of a quest for a new world view, a faith.

19. The biblical stories and ancient creeds do furnish precious insight for witnessing to the Gospel in the scientific world. Can theologians, however, with these insights, help scientists achieve responsible action in genetic engineering or nuclear physics? It would hardly seem possible so long as the great communication gap between these two groups persists. Those directly involved in and affected by scientific research can best discern and explicate the insights of Christian faith in terms of specific ethical positions.

Christian witness will point towards Jesus Christ in whom real humanity is revealed and who is in God's wisdom the centre of all creation, the "head over all things" (Eph. 1:10; 220. This witness will show the glory and the humility of human stewardship on this earth.

### *3. The Church and its Unity in God's Mission*

20. To receive the message of the kingdom of God is to be incorporated into the body of Christ, the Church, the author and sustainer of which is the Holy Spirit. The churches are to be a sign for the world. They are to intercede as he did, to serve as he did. Thus Christian mission is the action of the body of Christ in the history of humankind - a continuation of Pentecost. Those who through conversion and baptism accept the Gospel of Jesus partake in the life of the body of Christ and participate in an historical tradition. Sadly there are many betrayals of this high calling in the history of the churches. Many who are attracted to the vision of the kingdom find it difficult to be attracted to the concrete reality of the Church. They are invited to join in a continual process of renewal of the churches. "The challenge of facing the churches is not that the modern world is unconcerned about their evangelistic message, but rather whether they are so renewed in their life and thought that they become a living witness to the integrity of the Gospel. The evangelizing churches need themselves to receive the Good News and to let the Holy

Spirit remake their life when and how he wills"(Philip Potter, *op. cit.*,)

21. The celebration of the eucharist is the place for the renewal of the missionary conviction at the heart of every congregation. According to the Apostle Paul, the celebration of the eucharist is in itself a "proclamation of the death of the Lord until he comes" (I Cor. II: 26). "In such ways God feeds his people as they celebrate the mystery of the Eucharist so that they may confess in word and deed that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father"(*Your Kingdom Come*, p. 206.)

The Eucharist is bread for a missionary people. We acknowledge with deep sorrow the fact that Christians do not join together at the Lord's table. This contradicts God's will and impoverishes the body of Christ. The credibility of our Christian witness is at stake.

22. Christians are called to work for the renewal and transformation of the churches. Today there are many signs of the work of the Holy Spirit in such a renewal. *The house gatherings of the Church in China or the Basic Ecclesial Communities in Latin America, the liturgical renewal, biblical renewal, the revival of the monastic vocation, the charismatic movement, are indications of the renewal possibilities of the Church of Jesus Christ.*

23. In the announcement to the world of the reconciliation in Jesus Christ, churches are called to unite. Faced with the challenge and threat of the world, the churches often unite to defend common positions. But common witness should be the natural consequence of their unity with Christ in his mission. The ecumenical experience has discovered the reality of a deep spiritual unity. The common recognition of the authority of the Bible and of the creeds of the ancient Church and a growing convergence in doctrinal affirmations should allow the churches not only to affirm together the fundamentals of the Christian faith but also to proclaim together the Good News of Jesus Christ to the world. In solidarity, churches are 'helping each other in their respective witness before the world. In the same solidarity, they should share their spiritual and material resources to announce together and clearly their common hope and common calling.

24. "Often it is socially and politically more difficult to witness together since the powers of this world promote division. In such situations common witness is particularly precious and Christ-like. Witness that dares to be common is a powerful sign of unity coming directly and

visibly from Christ and a glimpse of his kingdom."(*Common Witness*, p. 28.)

The impulse for common witness comes from the depth of our faith. "Its urgency is underlined when we realize the seriousness of the human predicament and the tremendous task waiting for the churches at present."(*Ibid.*)

25. It is at the heart of Christian mission to foster the multiplication of local congregations in every human community. The planting of the seed of the Gospel will bring forward a people gathered around the Word and sacraments and called to announce God's revealed purpose.

Thanks to the faithful witness of disciples through the ages, churches have sprung up in practically every country. This task of sowing the seed needs to be continued until there is, in every human community, a cell of the kingdom, a church confessing Jesus Christ and in his name serving his people. The building up of the Church in every place is essential to the Gospel. The vicarious work of Christ demands the presence of a vicarious people. A vital instrument for the fulfillment of the missionary vocation of the Church is the local congregation.

26. The planting of the Church in different cultures demands a positive attitude towards inculturation of the Gospel. Ancient churches, through centuries of intimate relations with the cultures and aspirations of their people, have proved the powerful witnessing character of this rooting of the churches in the national soil. "Inculturation has its source and inspiration in the mystery of the Incarnation. The Word was made flesh. Here flesh means the fully concrete, human and created reality that Jesus was. Inculturation, therefore, becomes another way of describing Christian mission. If proclamation sees mission in the perspective of the Word to be proclaimed, inculturation sees mission in the perspective of the flesh, or concrete embodiment, which the Word assumes in a particular individual, community, institution or culture."(SEDOS Bulletin 81/No. 7.)

Inculturation should not be understood merely as intellectual research; it occurs when Christians express their faith in the symbols and images of their respective culture. The best way to stimulate the process of inculturation is to participate in the struggle of the less privileged for their liberation. Solidarity is the best teacher of common cultural values.

27. This growing cultural diversity could create some difficulties. In our attempt to express the catholicity of the Church we may lose the sense of its unity. But the unity we look for is not uniformity but the multiple expression of a common faith and a common mission.

"We have found this confession of Christ out of our various cultural contexts to be not only a mutually inspiring, but also a mutually corrective exchange. Without this sharing our individual affirmations would gradually become poorer and narrower. We need each other to regain the lost dimensions of confessing Christ and to discover dimensions unknown to us before. Sharing in this way, we are all changed and our cultures are transformed. (*Breaking Barriers*, p. 46.) The vision of nations coming from the East, the West, the North and the South to sit at the final banquet of the kingdom should always be before us in our missionary endeavor.

#### 4. *Mission in Christ's Way*

28. "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you" (John 20: 21). The self-emptying of the servant who lived among the people, sharing in their hopes and sufferings, giving his life on the cross for all humanity - this was Christ's way of proclaiming the Good News, and as disciples we are summoned to follow the same way. "A servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him" (John 13:16).

Our obedience in mission should be patterned on the ministry and teaching of Jesus. He gave his love and his time to all people. He praised the widow who gave her last coin to the temple; he received Nicodemus during the night; he called Matthew to the apostolate; he visited Zacchaeus in his home; he gave himself in a special way to the poor, consoling, affirming and challenging them. He spent long hours in prayer and lived in dependence on and willing obedience to God's will.

An imperialistic crusader's spirit was foreign to him. Churches are free to choose the ways they consider best to announce the Gospel to different people in different circumstances. But these options are never neutral. Every methodology illustrates or betrays the Gospel we announce. In all communications of the Gospel, power must be subordinate to love.

29. Our societies are undergoing a significant and rapid change under

the impact of new communication technologies and their applications. We are entering the age of the information society, characterized by an ever increasing media presence in all relationships, both interpersonal and intersocial. Christians need to re-think critically their responsibility for all communication processes and re-define the values of Christian communications. In the use-of all new media options, the communicating church must ensure that these instruments of communication are not masters, but servants in the proclaiming of the kingdom of God and its values. As servants, the new media options, kept within their own limits, will help to liberate societies from communication bondage and will place tools in the hands of communities for witnessing to Jesus Christ.

30. Evangelism happens in terms of interpersonal relations when the Holy Spirit quickens to faith. Through sharing the pains and joys of life, identifying with people, the Gospel is understood and communicated. *Often the primary confessors are precisely the non-publicized, unsensational people who gather together steadfastly in small caring communities, whose life prompts the question: "What is the source of the meaning of your life? What is the power of your powerlessness?"*, giving the occasion to name *THE NAME*. Shared experiences reveal how often Christ is confessed in the very silence of a prison cell or of a restricted but serving, waiting, praying church.

Mission calls for a serving church in every land, a church which is willing to be marked with the stigmata (nailmarks) of the crucified and risen Lord. In this way the church will show that it belongs to that movement of God's love shown in Christ who went to the periphery of life. Dying outside the gates of the city (Heb. 13: 12) he is the high priest offering himself for the salvation of the world. Outside the city gates the message of a self-giving, sharing love is truly proclaimed, here the Church renews its vocation to be the body of Christ in joyful fellowship with its risen Lord (I John. 3:16).

##### *5. Good News to the Poor*

31. There is a new awareness of the growing gap between wealth and poverty among the nations and inside each nation. It is a cruel reality that the number of people who do not reach the material level for a normal human life is growing steadily. An increasing number of people find themselves marginalized, second-class citizens unable to control their own destiny and unable to understand what is happening around

them. Racism, powerlessness, solitude, breaking of family and community ties are new evidences of the marginalization that comes under the category of poverty.

32. There is also a tragic coincidence that most of the world's poor have not heard the Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ; or they could not receive it, because it was not recognized as Good News in the way in which it was brought. This is a double injustice: they are victims of the oppression of an unjust economic order or an unjust political distribution of power, and at the same time they are deprived of the knowledge of God's special care for them. To announce the Good News to the poor is to begin to render the justice due to them. The Church of Jesus Christ is called to preach the Good News to the poor following the example of its Lord who was incarnated as poor, who lived as one among them and gave to them the promise of the kingdom of God. Jesus looked at the multitudes with compassion. He recognized the poor as those who were sinned against, victims of both personal and structural sin.

Out of this deep awareness came both his solidarity and his calling to them (Matt. 11:28). His calling was a personalized one. He invited them to come to him, to receive forgiveness of sins and to assume a task. He called them to follow him, because his love incorporated his respect for them as people created by God with freedom to respond. He called them to exercise this responsibility towards God, neighbors and their own lives. The proclamation of the Gospel among the poor is a sign of the messianic kingdom and a priority criterion by which to judge the validity of our missionary engagement today

33. This new awareness is an invitation to re-think priorities and lifestyles both in the local church and in the world wide missionary endeavor. Of course, churches and Christians find themselves in very different contexts: some in very wealthy settings where the experience of poverty as it is known to millions in the world today is practically unknown, or in egalitarian societies where the basic needs of life seem to be assured for almost everybody, to situations of extreme poverty. But the consciousness of the global nature of poverty and exploitation in the world today, the knowledge of the interdependence between nations and the understanding of the international missionary responsibility of the Church - all invite, in fact oblige, every church and every Christian to think of ways and means to share the Good News with the poor of today. An objective look at the life of every society, even the most

affluent and those which are, theoretically, more just, will show the reality of the poor today in the marginalized, the drop-outs who cannot cope with modern society, the prisoners of conscience, the dissidents. All of them are waiting for a cup of cold water or for a visit in the name of Christ. Churches are learning afresh through the poor of the earth to overcome the old dichotomies between evangelism and social action. The "spiritual Gospel" and "material Gospel" were in Jesus one Gospel.

34. There is no evangelism without solidarity; there is no Christian solidarity that does not involve sharing the knowledge of the kingdom which is God's promise to the poor of the earth. There is here a double credibility test: A proclamation that does not hold forth the promises of the justice of the kingdom to the poor of the earth is a caricature of the Gospel; but Christian participation in the struggles for justice which does not point towards the promises of the kingdom also makes a caricature of a Christian understanding of justice.

A growing consensus among Christians today speaks of God's preferential option for the poor.(Catholic Bishops Conference, Puebla, 1979, para. 1134.) We have there a valid yardstick to apply to our lives as individual Christians, local congregations and as missionary people of God in the world.

35. This concentration point, God's preferential option for the poor, raises the question of the Gospel for all those who objectively are not poor or do not consider themselves as such. It is a clear Christian conviction that God wants all human beings to be saved and to come to the knowledge of truth, but we know that, while God's purpose is for the salvation of all, he has worked historically through the people of Israel and through the incarnation of his own son Jesus Christ. While his purpose is universal, his action is always particular. What we are learning anew today is that God works through the downtrodden, the persecuted, the poor of the earth. And from there, he is calling all humanity to follow him. "If any one would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Matt. 16: 24).

For all of us, the invitation is clear; to follow Jesus in identification and sharing with the weak, marginalized and poor of the world, because in them we encounter him: Knowing from the Gospel and from historical experience that to be rich is to risk forfeiting the kingdom, and knowing how close the links are, in today's world, between the abundance of some and the needs of others, Christians are challenged to follow him,

surrendering all they are and have to the kingdom, to a struggle that commits us against all injustice, against all want. The preferential option for the poor, instead of discriminating against all other human beings, is, on the contrary, a guideline for the priorities and behavior of all Christians everywhere, pointing to the values around which we should organize our lives and the struggle in which we should put our energy.

36. There is a long experience in the Church of voluntary poverty, people who in obedience to their Christian calling cast aside all their belongings, make their own the fate of the poor of the earth, becoming one of them and living among them. Voluntary poverty has always been recognized as a source of spiritual inspiration, of insight into the heart of the Gospel.

Today we are gratefully surprised, as churches are growing among the poor of the earth, by the insight and perspective of the Gospel coming from the communities of the poor. They are discovering dimensions of the Gospel which have long been forgotten by the Church. The poor of the earth are reading reality from the other side, from the side of those who do not get the attention of the history books written by the conquerors, but who surely get God's attention in the book of life. Living with the poor and understanding the Bible from their perspective helps to discover the particular caring with which God both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament thinks of the marginalized, the downtrodden and the deprived. We realize that the poor to whom Jesus promised the kingdom of God are blessed in their longing for justice and in their hope for liberation. They are both subjects and bearers of the Good News; they have the right and the duty to announce the Gospel not only among themselves, but also to all other sectors of the human family.

Churches of the poor are spreading the liberating Gospel of Jesus Christ in almost every corner of the earth. The richness and freshness of their experience is an inspiration and blessing to churches with a centuries-old history. The centers of the missionary expansion of the Church are moving from the North to the South. God is working through the poor of the earth to awaken the consciousness of humanity to his call for repentance, for justice and for love.

## *6. Mission in and to Six Continents*

37. Everywhere the churches are in missionary situations. Even in

countries where the churches have been active for centuries we see life organized today without reference to Christian values, a growth of secularism understood as the absence of any final meaning. The Churches have lost vital contact with the workers and the youth and many others. This situation is so urgent that it commands priority attention of the ecumenical movement. The movement of migrants and political refugees brings the missionary frontier to the doorstep of every parish. The Christian affirmations on the worldwide missionary responsibility of the Church will be credible if they are authenticated by a serious missionary engagement at home.

As the world becomes smaller, it is possible even for Christians living far away to be aware of and inspired by faithful missionary engagement in a local situation. Of special importance today is the expression of solidarity among the churches crossing political frontiers and the symbolic actions of obedience of one part of the body of Christ that enhance the missionary work of other sectors of the Church. So, for example, while programs related to the elimination of racism may be seen as problems for some churches, such programs have become, for other churches, a sign of solidarity, an opportunity for witness and a test of Christian authenticity.

Every local congregation needs the awareness of its catholicity which comes from its participation in the mission of the Church of Jesus Christ in other parts of the world. Through its witnessing stance in its own situation, its prayers of intercession for churches in other parts of the world, and its sharing of persons and resources, it participates fully in the world mission of the Christian Church.

38. This concern for mission everywhere has been tested with the call for a moratorium, a halt - at least for a time - to sending and receiving missionaries and resources across national boundaries, in order to encourage the recovery and affirmation of the identity of every church, the concentration on mission in its own place and the freedom to reconsider traditional relations. The Lausanne Covenant noted that "the reduction of foreign missionaries and money in an evangelized country may sometimes be necessary to facilitate the national church's growth and self-reliance and to release resources for unevangelized areas".(Lausanne Covenant, No. 9) (*Your Kingdom Come*, pp. 220/221.) Moratorium does not mean the end of missionary vocation nor of the duty to provide resources for missionary work, but it does mean freedom to reconsider present engagements and to see whether a

continuation of what we have been doing for so long is the right style of mission in our day.

Moratorium has to be understood inside a concern for world mission. It is faithfulness of commitment to Christ in each national situation which makes missionary concern in other parts of the world authentic. There can never be a moratorium of mission, but it will always be possible, and sometimes necessary, to have a moratorium for the sake of better mission.

39. The story of the churches from their earliest years is the story of faithfulness in their respective localities, but also the story of the carrying of the Gospel across national and continental boundaries; first from Jerusalem to Judaea and Samaria, then to Asia Minor, Africa and Europe, now to the ends of the earth. Christians today are the heirs of a long history of those who left their home countries and churches, apostles, monastics, pilgrims, missionaries, emigrants, to work in the name of Jesus Christ, serving and preaching where the Gospel had not yet been heard or received. With the European colonization of most of the world and later on with the expansion of the colonial and neo-colonial presence of the western powers, the churches which had their bases mainly in the West have expanded their missionary service to all corners of the earth.

Surely, many ambiguities have accompanied this development and are present even today, not least the sin of proselytism among other Christian confessions. Churches and missionary organizations are analyzing the experience of these past centuries in order to correct their ways, precisely with the help of the new churches which have come into being in those countries. The history of the Church, the missionary people of God, needs to continue. Each local parish, each Christian, must be challenged to assume responsibility in the local mission of the Church. There will always be need for those who have the calling and the gift to cross frontiers, to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ and to serve in his name.

40. Out of this sense of being the whole Church in mission, we recognize the specific calling to individuals or communities to commit themselves full time to the service of the church, crossing cultural and national frontiers. The churches should not allow this specialized calling of the few to be an alibi for the whole Church, but rather it should be a symbolic concentration of the missionary vocation of the whole Church.

Looking at the question of people in mission today, "We perceive a change in the direction of mission, arising from our understanding of the Christ who is the center and who is always in movement towards the periphery. While not in any way denying the continuing significance and necessity of a mutuality between the churches in the northern and southern hemispheres, we believe that we can discern a development whereby mission in the eighties may increasingly take place within these zones. We feel there will be increasing traffic between the churches of Asia, Africa and Latin America among whose numbers both rich and poor are counted. This development, we expect, will take the form of even stronger initiatives from the churches of the poor and oppressed at the peripheries. Similarly among the industrialized countries, a new reciprocity, particularly one stemming from the marginalized groups, may lead to sharing at the peripheries of the richer societies. While resources may still flow from financially richer to poorer churches, and while it is not our intention to encourage isolationism, we feel that a benefit of this new reality could well be the loosening of the bond of domination and dependence that still so scandalously characterizes the relationship between many churches of the northern and southern hemispheres respectively".(*Your Kingdom Come*, p.205)

### *7. Witness among People of Living Faiths*

41. Christians owe the message of God's salvation in Jesus Christ to every person and to every people. Christians make their witness in the context of neighbors who live by other religious convictions and ideological persuasions. True witness follows Jesus Christ in respecting and affirming the uniqueness and freedom of others. We confess as Christians that we have often looked for the worst in others and have passed negative judgement upon other religions. We hope as Christians to be learning to witness to our neighbors in a humble, repentant and joyful spirit.

42. The Word is at work in every human life. In Jesus of Nazareth the Word became a human being. The wonder of his ministry of love persuades Christians to testify to people of every religious and non-religious persuasion of this decisive presence of God in Christ. In him is our salvation. Among Christians there are still differences of understanding as to how this salvation in Christ is available to people of diverse religious persuasions. But all agree that witness should be rendered to all.

43. Such an attitude springs from the assurance that God is the creator of the whole universe and that he has not left himself without witness at any time or any place. The Spirit of God is constantly at work in many ways that pass human understanding and in places that to us are least expected. In entering into a relationship of dialogue with others, therefore, Christians seek to discern the unsearchable riches of God and the way he deals with humanity. For Christians who come from cultures shaped by another faith, an even more intimate interior dialogue takes place as they seek to establish the connection in their lives between their cultural heritage and the deep convictions of their Christian faith.

44. Christians should use every opportunity to join hands with their neighbors, to work together to be communities of freedom, peace and mutual respect. In some places, state legislation hinders the freedom of conscience and the real exercise of religious freedom. Christian churches as well as communities of other faiths cannot be faithful to their vocation without the freedom and right to maintain their institutional form and confessional identity in a society and to transmit their faith from one generation to another. In those difficult situations, Christians should find a way, along with others, to enter into dialogue with the civil authorities in order to reach a common definition of religious freedom. With that freedom comes the responsibility to defend through common actions all human rights in those societies

45. Life with people of other faiths and ideologies is an encounter of commitments. Witness cannot be a one-way process, but of necessity is two-way; in it Christians become aware of some of the deepest convictions of their neighbors. It is also the time in which, within a spirit of openness and trust, Christians are able to bear authentic witness, giving an account of their commitment to the Christ, who calls all people to himself.

### **Looking Toward The Future**

46. Whether among the secularized masses of industrial societies, the emerging new ideologies around which societies are organized, the resurging religions which people embrace, the movements of workers and political refugees, the people's search for liberation and justice, the uncertain pilgrimage of the younger generation into a future both full of promise and overshadowed by nuclear confrontation - the Church is called to be present and to articulate the meaning of God's love in Jesus

Christ for every person and for every situation.

47. The missionary vocation of the Church and its evangelistic calling will not resist the confrontation with the hard realities of daily life if it is not sustained by faith, *a faith supported by prayer contemplation and adoration*. "Gathering and dispersing, receiving and giving, praise and work, prayer and struggle - this is the true rhythm of Christian engagement in the world." (*Your Kingdom Come*, p. 204.) Christians must bring their hearts, minds and wills to the altar of God, knowing that from worship comes wisdom, from prayer comes strength, and from fellowship comes endurance. "To be incorporated into Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit is the greatest blessing of the kingdom, and the only abiding ground of our missionary activity in the world. The same Lord who sends his people to cross all frontiers and to enter into the most unknown territories in his name, is the one who assures: "I am with you always, to the close of the age."

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# Edinburgh to Salvador: Twentieth Century Ecumenical Missiology by T.V. Philip

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