

Evangelisation and Ecumenism: Contradiction or Challenge?*

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Ecumenism: An Attribute of the Church

The greatest stumbling-block to ecumenism is not the World Council of Churches in Geneva, nor the Moscow Patriarchate, nor the Vatican, as many still believe, but the concept of ecumenism itself. For according to the frequently-cited statement issued by the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches in Rolle in 1951 ecumenism is 'the whole task of the whole church to bring the Gospel to the whole world'.¹ Ecumenism is thus an attribute of the church; namely, the catholicity with which it addresses the whole world with the full Gospel. Without this attribute there can be no church, nor can there ever have been. It is thus *articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae*: a non-ecumenical church in this sense would not be a true church, but a sect. Ecumenism and mission, evangelisation and church community converge in a common witness to the same God and Father of Israel and Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit, for no church can claim God exclusively for its own, and all churches can be traced back through the ages to the same Christ. However, from the very beginning this task of universal evangelisation and ecumenism took shape in separate, local communities: Jerusalem, Antioch, Corinth, Rome. Similarly, the four Gospels emerged from different cultural contexts, but they all bring the same message from and about Jesus Christ. Within the ecumenical movement inculturation of local groups and parishes and their orientation towards universal catholicity and complete faithfulness to the Gospel takes the form of brotherly, conciliar consultation (c.f. Acts 15, the council of the Apostles in Jerusalem). Throughout history the one church of Jesus Christ has been formed from all nations according to 'the great commission' in Matthew 28: 19–20:

Go, therefore, make disciples of all the nations; baptise them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all the commandments I gave you.

The gift and source of this conversion and reconciliation of all peoples in Christ is a gift of life. As the World Conference on Faith and Order in Montreal in 1963 put it: '... we exist as Christians by the Tradition of the Gospel, testified in Scripture, trans-

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mitted in and by the Church, through the power of the Holy Spirit.' It is the power of God himself which brings us together from all peoples into a new living community, overcoming the limitations of language, culture and nation. As the *Epistle to Diognetus* from the mid-second century testifies, the Gospel is the true homeland for people of every nation. The Church of Christ is thus, as Heinrich Heine called it, a portable homeland (*ein tragbares Vaterland*). Consequently, 'Made in Germany', 'Made in Poland', or 'Made in Russia' do not apply to the church. Although the only way the church of Christ can develop is among particular groups of people in all nations and cultures, it is certainly not the product of any local or national self-assembly kit. It is this transmitting of the Gospel across borders to all peoples, over the whole Earth and until Judgment Day that Matthew calls the Gospel of ecumenism (Matt. 24:14). This involves the proclamation of God's mercy, which 'covers the whole Earth' (Sir. 18:12); both the message of reconciliation that has been entrusted to us (2 Cor. 5: 18–20) and the power of reconciliation that activates us in the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:26).

Ecumenism and Mission as a Learning Process in the 'School of Compassion'

The ecumenical movement, which comes from the Gospel characterised as the 'Gospel of peace' (Eph. 2), is a learning process ('*matheteusate*'); the church itself is a 'school of compassion' – Isaac the Syrian's definition used in the working document for Graz. Here we are to learn that God 'is not far from any of us' (Acts 17:27) and that our churches are to form the *oikonomia*, or household of God, in this world.² We are the ones who are to witness to the fact that God inhabits Creation and everything in it.³ We are the ones who, like icons, reflect God's compassion and the fact that he inhabits everything, into and beyond all cultures and nations. Ecumenism is unthinkable without this missionary and eschatological awareness of history. The transition from Jerusalem to Greece and Rome, the penetration of the Slavic world by the agency of Prince Vladimir and the work of Cyril and Methodius, the conversion of Latin America through the witness of Bartolomé de las Casas, the 'mission to six continents' proclaimed at Mexico City in 1963: this ever-changing mobility of Christianity is its ecumenical quality.

Mission and ecumenism thus proceed hand in hand from the outset. Together they form the catholicity of the church. Since 1961 both have been combined in an organised way in the World Council of Churches. The formation of the church – ecclesio-genesis⁴ as Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Leonardo Boff called it – is a continual process as all the nations produce new generations of young people who are called to a common witness, and who, once baptised, are 'joined together in a sacramental bond of unity and are dependent upon each other' (*Unitatis redintegratio* Para. 21). The Gospel witnessed to in this way is itself the assembled power of God (*ekklesia* means assembly) before the coming of His kingdom. Its ecumenical embodiment is an eschatological gift of salvation from God given throughout the centuries, never complete, always to be encountered and received anew, in many contexts, in many forms, in one tradition which is 'open to the future'.⁵ It is the gradual fulfilment of Gal. 3: 28:

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

Thus ecumenism and evangelisation, openness towards newcomers and true love and unity amongst those already baptised into this new world of God, can never be in opposition to each other.

The Image of God and the Graffiti of Men

Sadly, words from Zlata Filipović's Sarajevo diary also apply to this history of the church:

With the black pencil of war and violence we, God's children, have written on one another's foreheads: Croat, Serb, Sinti, Russian, Pole, Czech, Slovak, Greek, Turk, Briton, Irishman.

One should add: Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox, Muslim, Jew. Thus for 2000 years we have daubed the image of God in us with horrible graffiti; we have flooded the face of the earth with blood and once again spilt the blood of Jesus Christ. In the twentieth century two terrible world wars and 40 years of Cold War have transformed our European continent into a place of horrors: battlefields, cemeteries, weapons arsenals, concentration camps, the gulag. Almost everywhere there is insecurity, fear, suspicion: intrusive bureaucracy, persecution of minorities. Terrible dictatorships have made their mark on history and oppressed citizens and whole peoples: Hitler, Mussolini, Franco, Tito and Stalin have become for us evil symbols of what the tyranny, violence and lust for power of political leaders can do. Today their seductive attraction keeps on haunting us when neo-Nazism, nationalism and antisemitism flare up. The American author Tina Rosenberg has described Europe as a land filled with the ghosts of the past – a haunted land.⁶

The Micromechanism of Power

Power and dominion, war and violence, suspicion and spying are, however, not natural laws, nor can they be explained by the ambition or greed of individual rulers alone. As the French philosopher Michel Foucault has explained, a micromechanism of power⁷ is at work amongst us: we consistently take great pains to accuse others of being the perpetrators of our own misery, thus reducing our own part in the affair to nothing. We seem to be unable to prevent the formation of enemy images (the Russian bear, the German peril, the Turkish threat) and so-called 'structural evil' (western decadence, Slavic idleness, Muslim intolerance); and we are also unable to defend ourselves against them. Thus powerful individuals and interest groups are able to hold sway over us. It was in this way that we allowed ourselves to be seduced by fascism in the face of the Bolshevik threat, and accepted the incalculable cost, danger and damage of the nuclear arms race in the face of the threat of nuclear war. And for the same reason we are now closing our borders to refugees and asylum seekers from Eastern European and non-European cultures and continually repeating that first we have to look after our own.

Enlightenment and Education

The European Enlightenment sought to combat this micromechanism of power by educating citizens, by emancipating every individual: men, women, children; workers, peasants, clerks, tradesmen. Education, school instruction, the franchise, the right to protest, free speech: all these have lived on in European civilisation despite

the damage and setbacks they have suffered through violence. However, the Enlightenment has raised awareness of our autonomy to such an extent that we have begun to view law, politics, science, truth, technology and economy only from the perspective of human control and volition. This tendency is opposed by the cultures of the East, which for centuries have been influenced by experiences of suffering and have learnt to understand what it means to live a life dependent on God and orientated towards God. It is also opposed by Christians in the West who see the Enlightenment as the cause of the secularisation of Europe and believe that the East should be protected from it in advance. Indeed, some claim that the slogans of freedom, autonomy, education and emancipation are illusory *grands récits* which are bound to give way to pure individualism, the endless uncontrolled interchange of ideas on the market model, a pluralism of values and truths. In their philosophical and political essays Alain Finkielkraut⁸ and Otto Kallscheuer⁹ have condemned these three forms of criticism of the Enlightenment – justifiably, in my opinion. Even if we have come to know the deficiencies of liberal Enlightenment – just as the East had to experience the disaster of *raison d'état* and party planning politics which resulted from the same Enlightenment – that is no reason to renounce the entire concept of human freedom and responsibility.

The People of Europe

Following their first joint meeting in Chantilly in 1977 the European bishops made the following declaration:

Today Europe is divided by politics, fragmented on the basis of religion and world view. It stands in the shadow of powerful political forces, but *the people* of Europe have realised that they are not only in control of the past, but will also shape their common future.¹⁰

The people of Europe – prophetic words! *We* have been victorious. A few months after the First European Ecumenical Assembly in Basel in 1989 came the changes in Eastern Europe; we tore down the wall and the Iron Curtain with our bare hands and shook each others' hands across a bridge between East and West. With this came the opportunity for political cooperation and free economic and cultural exchange between Western, Central and Eastern Europe. At Basel the European churches agreed upon a conciliar process of peace, justice and the conservation of creation. Unfortunately, this was not an immediate success. With the changes in Eastern Europe came the great disappointment: everything was not going to change overnight, peace was not going to come at once. The wealth of the West and the misery of the East were not going to be balanced out according to the requirements of justice. The earlier geopolitical, ethnic and national conflicts which had been concealed and suppressed by dictatorship suddenly flared up with renewed vigour. There were new crises and civil wars, ethnic cleansing, genocide: Sarajevo, Srebrenica, Grozny became pictures of horror. What was lacking were the instruments to build up new structures of freedom: elements of a civil society such as churches, trade unions, business enterprises, clubs, interest groups. What was lacking were *structures for reconciliation*. Between the hostile recriminations of rulers on the one hand and civil rights and individual freedom on the other hand it is necessary that there should be not only the organs of a civil society but also a social atmosphere of reconciliation, which is an absolute precondition for the rebuilding of a truly humane society where human rights are respected. Whoever forgoes ecumenism and

tolerance – even in the name of truth – must in the long run forgo truth as well as he will be forced to use violence and power.

Today, in Graz in 1997, we are assembled under the theme 'Reconciliation: Gift of God and Source of New Life'. Perhaps we have fewer dreams now, as the changes in Eastern Europe do not yet amount to a conversion, and liberation from Cold War, the Wall and the Iron Curtain has not yet brought peace and unity amongst peoples and churches. This is no surprise, as the terrible history of the horrific century soon to end cannot be wiped out overnight. Socialism had some positive features, but they quickly disappeared; the negative features of an uncontrolled market economy have quickly become evident. Was it right to give property back to the original owners without compensating the current owners? To punish minor informers while leaving generals at their posts? How is reconciliation possible when one cannot but deplore the failure to prosecute so many persecutors and oppressors? Our memory must take the time to let the wounds of the past heal through new experiences of hope and gradual revelation of the truth. Nevertheless, we want to be filled with the hope of finding a source of new life in God's name. Could the ecumenical movement be this source?

The Organised Ecumenical Movements of the Twentieth Century

The ecumenical ideal I have described above is set out in the Gospel of God in Jesus Christ, and has constantly tried to create new forms in which to express itself in the course of the history of Christianity, from the so-called Apostles' Council at Jerusalem to the 'Ecumenical' Councils of the fourth and fifth centuries, from the reforming synods of the Middle Ages to the colloquia of the Reformation, from the transconfessional ecumenism of the Enlightenment to the regressive appeal to the model of the 'undivided church' in the Romantic age. In the twentieth century it has taken a specifically organisational form. I would like to comment on this form, and on its origin, failings and lasting significance, in seven stages.

(1) Several areas of cooperation were the impetus for the formation of the World Council of Churches in 1938–48: cooperation in mission, in church work for peace and society (the social Gospel) and in joint reflection on the common Biblical message of God the Creator, Jesus the Redeemer and the Holy Spirit as the power of God, which is witnessed to and passed on in baptism and the eucharist. Ecumenism thus originated in problems of mission, which were created by modernity. There was the need for cooperation amongst the many mission societies that emerged in the nineteenth century due to increased mobility and the rise of the proletariat in American and European cities as a consequence of industrialisation. There was an increase in Biblical instruction in many churches and confrontation with modern scientific theory. These factors obliged the churches to think through together the essence of the Gospel, albeit in a kind of competition, as a 'Christian Internationale' against the 'Socialist Internationale' and the myth of fascism, both of which developed their own ideas of world domination. From the beginning the Anglican, Reformed and Eastern church traditions (the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the Greek Orthodox Church, the oriental churches) endeavoured to come to an understanding and thus contribute to the unity of the peoples of Europe, who were split by the schism of 1054 between Rome and Constantinople and the schism of 1517 between Rome and the Reformation churches. At the pan-Orthodox conference in Rhodes in 1959 it was decided that the Orthodox churches of the Eastern bloc would join the

ecumenical movement. Khrushchev allowed this to happen at New Delhi in 1961. At the Second Vatican Council (1962–65) the Catholic Church endorsed this one ecumenical movement. Through its Pontifical Council for Christian Unity it arranged for dialogue and forms of cooperation with the other international Christian communities and with their privileged instrument, the World Council of Churches. All the historical churches of Europe have thus been engaged in ecumenical discussion since at least 1964 (*Unitatis redintegratio*). This has been taking place, moreover, on many levels: in parish life, in national and regional church councils, in theological education and in the reunification of churches.

(2) Since 1948 the World Council of Churches, based in Geneva, has been trying to ‘call the churches to visible unity in one faith, in one baptism and in one eucharistic community, with a view to achieving joint witness and common service by the churches in the world’. It is the churches *in the world* which must be unified; not some sort of invisible church or Christian ideal, but churches shaped by nations and cultures, with long histories of separation and theological and social confrontation. The WCC has been concerned with replacing this programme of separation with a programme of reconciliation which seeks to make separate truths into a common truth once again.

The decision to form the WCC on the basis of national church representation and not according to confessional families, as others had suggested, had disastrous consequences in the context of European political relations. National church representation corresponded to the Orthodox understanding of national church autocephaly and the symphony of church and state, as well as to the ‘national church’ tradition of the reformed churches. Consequently, specifically national interests were too prominent in too many discussions and votes. The churches often played the same game as the United Nations, and church leaders sometimes behaved like amateur diplomats.¹¹ From the beginning the WCC was concerned not only with church unity but also with peace and social welfare issues, on the model of Christ as servant and the serving Church. Thus no one was able or willing to adopt a neutral attitude towards historical events, and it was therefore impossible to reach a common Christian position. A particular ‘theology of service’ and a programme for a serving church which was developed in Eastern Europe became the embodiment of the ideological imprisonment of the churches.

The WCC was founded right at the beginning of the Cold War between East and West, and at the beginning of the process of decolonisation and liberation of the South from the political patronage of the North. In 1961 at New Delhi, along with the Slavic eastern churches from the countries under communist regimes, many ‘young churches’ from the southern hemisphere entered the WCC. The ideological antithesis between Marxism and capitalism, above all in the sphere of economic systems and political alliances, thus ‘colonised’ the decolonisation process. The struggle against racism, poverty and oppression, although in every respect essentially a Christian task arising from genuinely Christian inspiration, thus came under ideological suspicion and was exploited by many church representatives in the WCC in an ideological sense. Injustice and suffering under communist state terror were played down and frequently covered up on the pretext of quiet diplomacy. When this silence was openly criticised at the Nairobi Assembly the delegates’ reaction was certainly inadequate. Cordial relations continued to exist with the Christian Peace Conference in Czechoslovakia even after the catastrophic events in Prague in 1968, while only secret letters were exchanged with members of Charter 77 without any declaration of

public support. The WCC issued only weak statements of concern about the brutal and exploitative Ceaușescu regime in Romania. Usually it was regime-friendly officials from Eastern European churches who resisted strong protests or reactions, as in the case of the Afghanistan declaration at Vancouver in 1983.

Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to view the WCC from this perspective only and to issue a blanket condemnation of its work as a betrayal of the aims of Jesus Christ, or to use its mistaken policies as a reason for now distancing oneself from the ecumenical movement as such or for leaving it altogether (as the Georgian Orthodox Church has done). It would be far better if the churches in East and West which supported and fêted these 'collaborating' or silent church officials could now come clean about the wrong decisions made at that time and renew their commitment to the ecumenical ideal with fresh enthusiasm and truly free personnel. Any church which leaves the WCC today will be obliged to start its own ecumenical movement tomorrow if it wants to avoid complete sectarian isolation amidst its sister churches.

(3) The work of the ecumenical movement is primarily aimed at achieving Christian understanding amongst divided churches, but as has often been said, this should not be an end in itself. With a prayer from the great Litany of All Saints, *Pacem ac unitatem largiri digneris*, on the eve of the Second Vatican Council Pope John XXIII proclaimed that the unity of the Church as a complete communion of sister churches was a precondition for peace amongst peoples. Without religious peace there can be no peace on earth. Without ecumenism there can be no credible mission.

The results of this endeavour give us in my opinion considerable grounds for hope. In the face of pessimism we need to take a realistic look at what has been achieved. Over the past 30 years we have learnt much from and with each other:

- (i) A common declaration of the apostolic faith in the light both of the Word of God and of current issues affecting humanity: a truly ecumenical catechism.¹²
- (ii) A common view of the sacraments of the New Testament, baptism and the eucharist (the Lima text).¹³
- (iii) A common view of our duty to work for peace, justice and the preservation of creation in a conciliar process, by recognising universal human rights, above all interreligious tolerance and the struggle against discrimination on grounds of race, gender, disability, age or sex, in accordance with Galatians 3:28.¹⁴
- (iv) A growing openness towards establishing church community (*koinonia*) in faith, witness and service in the world while gradually overcoming the excommunications and rejections of the past.¹⁵
- (v) A growing willingness to treat other churches as sister churches, with their own spirituality, while recognising their liturgical, catechetical and organisational forms, and a willingness to enter into conciliar forms of joint discussion about all questions of the Christian exegesis of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.
- (vi) A growing movement of parish contacts and interdenominational church encounters, which has promoted understanding of diversity without alienation and of community despite differences. Forms of participation in the sacraments of other churches are allowed by many churches in particular circumstances. Thus division does not extend beyond the grave, stand in the way of love between partners of

different confessions or prevent parents and children in mixed marriages hearing and experiencing the one Gospel.

(4) Of course we have not yet solved all the problems which must be solved before full communion can be restored:

- (i) The rejections of the past live on in fear of contact and questions of jurisdiction, and sometimes in new excommunications. The churches still have difficulties with Christians in marriages of different denominations, as well as with church members who move to other churches.
- (ii) There are still groups who for the sake of Truth are hostile towards the ecumenical movement.
- (iii) There are new issues which so far we have not been prepared to discuss jointly: for example, many moral questions (in the areas of marriage and sexuality, the possession and distribution of the earth's riches, the use of violence and punishment, population policy and ecology), as well as the question of the role of women in all areas of church life.
- (iv) There are new independent groups, movements and churches unconnected with the historical churches which have started entering into disputes with the older churches and have no qualms about doing missionary work amongst their members (proselytising).
- (v) There are large numbers of non-Christian and ex-Christian citizens in Europe alongside whom Christians have to live in peace without forgoing their belief that God calls all to worship in spirit and in truth.
- (vi) There are other children of Abraham in Europe besides Christians. Several million Jews, who survived the terrible Holocaust, and 30 million Muslims, with whom we have only just begun a common learning process in the sight of God, as well as many millions of followers of other religions whose convictions we sometimes encounter distorted by New Religious Movements from Asia and America, as is clear from the widespread belief in reincarnation.
- (vii) Finally, there is in East and West, especially in Eastern Europe, a strong suspicion of the World Council of Churches and the Conference of European Churches because they did not care sufficiently about the suffering of the victims of dictatorships and *nomenklatura* during the period of ideological imprisonment of the church, or behaved in a politically neutral, or even friendly, manner towards the communist social systems. We must take this suspicion into account.

(5) What can be said today about the role of organised ecumenism, despite the partial failure of the past? For its possible failure does not release us from the task set by Christ himself. With only a very few exceptions patriarchs, bishops and moderators of our churches never tire of promoting the ecumenical movement, despite its failings. What are its strengths, and what mistakes has it made? And above all, what can we do to avoid the same mistakes in future?

Its strength is the growing awareness that we cannot find God's truth by force and coercion, but only through convincing witness and listening to one another. The ecumenical dialogue has taught us that God's Holy Spirit sometimes speaks to us through the witness of other churches¹⁶ and that the contributions of all churches are necessary for joint witness.

The ecumenical dialogue has taught us that the church needs continual reform and renewed reflection so that it does not speak about God and the Gospel in an incomprehensible language, so that it becomes interested in new forms of expression, so that it escapes the dangers of habit and power, so that it continually readopts a dynamic, eschatological understanding of tradition, for the Spirit *will* lead us all to the whole truth.

We have thus learnt a great deal from each other in theology and liturgy, and in the symbolic universe of our forms of faith. There is also much that we have simply adopted:

- (i) From the Eastern churches, respect for the communion of saints throughout the ages, reverence for the ecumenical councils of the ancient church, study of monastic spirituality that keeps us constantly ready for the kingdom of God, and emphasis on the importance of autonomous local and member churches in a system of synodal democracy.
- (ii) From the Reformed churches, obedience to God's word in the Holy Scriptures, the spirituality of inner asceticism (Troeltsch), and the conviction that justification of the sinner must be a matter of faith and grace alone.
- (iii) From the Latin church of the West, the advantages of structural integration of all member churches in a worldwide catholicity which speaks to the poor in mission and worldwide service.
- (iv) From the newer Methodist, Baptist and Pentecostal churches in the Anglo-Saxon region, their radical mission to the weak, ill and marginalised in our society, and their sincere attempt to unite faith and practice on a day-to-day basis.

(6) On the eve of the third millennium we need this ecumenical ideal and also its instruments – the WCC and the confessional world communities, the CEC in co-operation with the Council of European Catholic Bishops' Conferences (CCEE) – more than ever, for four reasons:

- (i) The many separate Christian voices in so many different contexts, the growing number of independent churches in Africa and Asia, the mission movements of the Pentecostals and the Evangelicals, as well as the various piety movements in the main churches, for example the charismatic movement, require a *conciliar forum* where they can discuss their own emphases with the historical churches within the common tradition of the Gospel: how far may diversity go, and how much convergence is necessary in order to fulfil the wish of Jesus Christ that all might be one?
- (ii) The Christian churches inhabit this world with followers of other religions, some of whom revere the same God as we do and all of whom share the same humanity. There is no better instrument for this dialogue than the conciliar association of Christian churches in the WCC and the confessional world communities. This dialogue is not to be conducted exclusively at local level.
- (iii) The Christian churches inhabit this world, and certainly Europe, with people who do not believe in God but who share the same problems, doubts and search for human values. This situation raises issues of

- peaceful and just coexistence and survival.
- (iv) The Christian churches cannot fulfil their joint task of mission and evangelisation without one another, and certainly not if they set themselves against one another. The difficulties surrounding proselytism in Eastern Europe do not stem from the ecumenical movement, but from groups and churches who want to remain aloof from this movement. However, as they bear witness to the Gospel in the name of the same Lord, there must be discussion with these groups and churches too in the name of the Lord about this Gospel and about how it is to be preached.

The fifth World Conference on Faith and Order in Santiago de Compostela in 1993 issued the following statement on this problem:

We believe that most groups and individuals engaged in such activities are acting out of true concern for the benefit of those whom they are addressing; however, we must take up dialogue with them and their methods and intentions must be called into question. Wherever churches show spiritual vitality in faith, life and witness, there coercion, manipulation and proselytism seem to have no effect.¹⁷

In the early 1960s the main churches promised within the framework of the WCC and at the Second Vatican Council not to carry out missionary work among members of other churches, to give mutual recognition to baptism and to afford religious freedom if someone leaves one church and wishes to move to another. However, the eastern churches have the concept of 'canonical territory', and this plays a part here. The ancient church held that there should not be two bishops in a town. The unity of the church of Christ is seen as precluding splits or competition between different groups and movements. In this context a model of church pluralism along the lines of 'reconciled diversity' is not a viable model of unity. The discussion about 'mission or proselytism' will have to reckon with these different understandings of the objectives of church unity. At the same time, however, the eastern churches must recognise the *de facto* pluralism of the confessions which coexist on 'their' territory if they are not to violate the principle of religious freedom, which is indispensable for tolerance and peace.

(7) The main task for the churches of Eastern and Western Europe is the great common task of mission, which they can only fulfil together in ecumenical partnership. To talk about the 'New Evangelisation' of Europe in this case is dangerous and sounds too pretentious. The term seems to suggest that at some time in the past Europe was evangelised or Christian. If nothing else, our violent history should prompt us to ask: was Europe ever Christian?¹⁸

The call to a (new) evangelisation of Europe can also be misunderstood if it does not take into account the concerns of the Orthodox churches, of the Reformation and of the Enlightenment. It is credible only if it places simultaneous emphasis on dialogue and tolerance between Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Without radical alterations in the self-perception of the western Latin churches in communion with Rome, the call would from the outset be a sign of a new triumphalism. In a lengthy learning process, however, that involves us ourselves in conversion, the churches can learn from each other how to evangelise:

- (i) From Orthodoxy we can gain a fuller understanding of the eschata-

logical glory of the trinitarian God (*doxa theou*) which is realised pastorally, liturgically and doctrinally in a greater attention to beauty and joy in faith.

- (ii) From the Reformation we can gain a fuller understanding of a personal relationship with God and of how to lead one's life according to God's Word, which is appreciated as a prophetic and critical narrative rather than abused as a legitimation principle for institutional forms (as is constantly happening in areas such as the ordination of women, election of bishops, rights of primates, bans on inter-communion and church teaching on marriage).
- (iii) From the Enlightenment we can gain a fuller understanding of the relationship between faith and reason, which will enable us to bridge the terrible gulf between faith and knowledge. A central task here will be to consider anew how faith and reason can together be directed against all kinds of violence.
- (iv) The three religions of Abraham carry joint and separate responsibility for the service of God in European culture. Their understandings of God must be compared critically and creatively in a constant dialogue and their potential for violence gradually overcome until everyone is convinced that violence has nothing to do with God.
- (v) The European churches must open a joint school of compassion for all who have lost their faith or who have not yet found one.

In order to achieve these missionary objectives the churches of Europe need powerful ecumenical instruments of reconciliation:

- (a) A European council of churches, with equal representation of Orthodox, Roman Catholic and Reformed churches.
- (b) Regular meetings between the four current patriarchs of Europe, the bishops of Rome, Constantinople, Moscow and Canterbury.
- (c) Further promotion of ecumenism amongst the Reformed churches on the basis of the Leuenberg, Meissen and Porvoo agreements.
- (d) An intensive exchange between parishioners, theology lecturers and students in the various churches in East and West.
- (e) The development of joint strategies of mission and catechisation for the nations of Eastern and Western Europe.
- (f) A special church fund for diaconal solidarity with the poor churches in Eastern and Western Europe.

Conclusion

What we need above all for the future is a renewal of the alliances which were forged at the first European Ecumenical Assembly in Basel in 1989, and in first place the renunciation of all violence. We are duty bound to the true alliance of our *koinonia*, namely, to our baptism, which is stronger than our national loyalties and which reminds us, despite boundaries of peoples, nations and states, that we are members of one body of Christ. After all, we are recognised by God not according to our nationality, but as citizens of His one kingdom. A change of direction towards God that brings true joy and hope: that is the theme of the Eighth General Assembly of the WCC in 1998 in Harare. May the living God make us ready for this.

Notes and References

- ¹ *The First Six Years* (Geneva, 1954), p. 126: 'It is important to insist that this word, which comes from the Greek word for the whole inhabited earth, is properly used to describe everything that relates to the whole task of the whole church to bring the Gospel to the whole world. It therefore covers equally the missionary movement and the movement towards unity, and must not be used to describe the latter in contradistinction to the former. We believe that a real service will be rendered to true thinking on these subjects in the Churches if we so use this word that it covers both Unity and Mission in the context of the whole world.'
- ² Konrad Raiser, *Ökumene in Übergang: Paradigmenwechsel in der ökumenischen Bewegung* (Kaiser, Munich, 1989).
- ³ Th. Sundermeier (ed. Volker Küster), *Konvivenz und Differenz: Studien zu einer verstehenden Missionswissenschaft* (Evangelisches Missionsverlag, Erlangen, 1995).
- ⁴ See Anton Houtepen, 'Kirche im Werden: Fundamentaltheologische Beiträge zu einer ökumenischen Ekklesiologie', *Ökumenische Rundschau*, no. 36 (1987), pp. 397–420.
- ⁵ J. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion* (SCM, London, 1985).
- ⁶ T. Rosenberg, *The Haunted Land: Facing Europe's Ghosts After Communism* (Vintage, London, 1995).
- ⁷ M. Foucault, *Microfisica del potere: Interventi politici* (Einaudi, Turin, 1977).
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