

Call to Unity

RESOURCING THE CHURCH FOR ECUMENICAL MINISTRY

Issue 2 • May 2004



Council On
Christian Unity

**Global Challenges to the Church's
Vocation of Unity**



FROM THE EDITOR

Challenges to the Ecumenical Vocation

This second issue of *Call to Unity* brings together an exciting collection of articles representing a series of lectureships sponsored by the Council on Christian Unity over the past year.

- In May, **Fr. Ioan Sauca**, a Romanian Orthodox priest and Director of the Ecumenical Institute of the World Council of Churches at Bossey, addresses the theme of the “boundaries of the church” as he explores a critical challenge to the ecumenical movement in understanding the relation between the Orthodox Church and other churches and confessions.
- In June, **Dr. Wesley Ariarajah**, a Methodist minister who grew up in Sri Lanka and has served as the Executive Director for the World Council of Churches’ Program of Interfaith Dialogue and Relations, examines the nature of the world we live in (*an interfaith world*) and the kind of Christian witness (*professing Christ*) appropriate to that world at this stage in history.
- In October, **Dr. Janice Love**, a United Methodist laywoman who teaches in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of South Carolina and who serves as moderator for the international working group of the World Council of Churches’ initiative in the “Decade to Overcome Violence,” explores the intimate connection between Christian Unity and working for peace with justice in our nation and world today.

• In November, **Dr. Michael Kinnamon**, an ordained Disciples minister and noted ecumenist who teaches at Eden Theological Seminary in St. Louis, challenges the ecumenical movement at that point where divisions in the body of Christ often exacerbate political conflicts and hinder effective peacemaking.

This issue of *Call to Unity* represents in a small, yet significant way, the global context and setting of the ecumenical movement today. Orthodoxy; interfaith relations and dialogue; overcoming violence; seeking peace—each of these challenges are worthy of our calling as Christians: as they frame an exciting agenda for the church seeking to manifest its given unity in Christ, while witnessing to the power of God’s reconciling love in the face of hostility, conflict and war.

No small agenda here! Certainly not one of maintenance or institutional survival!

Four lectures. Four very different individuals. Four major challenges to the church and its vocation of Christian unity in these times.

Robert Welsh

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Resourcing the Church for Ecumenical Ministry

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Global Challenges to the Church's Vocation of Unity

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The Church Beyond Our Boundaries and the Ecumenical Vocation of Orthodoxy

Ioan Sauca

TWENTIETH PETER AINSLIE LECTURE ON CHRISTIAN UNITY
UNIVERSITY OF SEATTLE, SEATTLE, WASHINGTON, MAY 16, 2003

Fr. Ioan Sauca is Director of the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey and an ordained priest in the Orthodox Church of Romania.

Ecclésiology was from the very beginning of the Ecumenical movement one of the most central, delicate and sensitive issues. The Toronto Statement of 1950 was a necessity to assure the member churches that entering the WCC none will lose or diminish its identity, none will be obliged to recognize the ecclesiality of another church and that the WCC is not and will not become a super-Church. The clear affirmations of ecclesial neutrality opened the way for the Orthodox churches to become WCC members in particular after 1961. Despite it, however, two ecclesiological approaches, one Orthodox and the other one more generally Protestant, could be identified behind different WCC documents issued since then, in particular those referring to the issue of Christian unity.

The General Assembly in New Delhi made such a first statement on unity. The Orthodox participants, however, wrote a response to that statement and expressed the Orthodox position concerning Christian unity. The response identifies the two approaches which despite efforts could be traced in all the documents dealing with such topics until today: "The ecumenical problem, as it is understood in the current ecumenical movement, is primarily a problem of the Protestant world. The main question, in this setting, is that of *Denominationalism*." Accordingly, the problem of Christian unity, or of Christian Reunion, is usually regarded in terms of an interdenominational agreement or Reconciliation. In the Protestant

Universe of discourse such approach is quite natural. But for the Orthodox it is uncongenial.

For the Orthodox the basic ecumenical problem is that of schism. The Orthodox cannot accept the idea of a "parity of denomination" and cannot visualize Christian Reunion just as an interdenominational adjustment. The unity has been broken and must be recovered. The Orthodox Church is not a confession—one of many, one among many. For the Orthodox, the Orthodox Church is just the Church. The Orthodox Church is aware and conscious of the identity of her inner structure and teaching with the apostolic message (*kerygma*) and the tradition of the ancient undivided Church. She finds herself in an unbroken and continuous succession of sacramental ministry, sacramental life and faith.

Witness to the ancient undivided Church

Indeed, for the Orthodox the apostolic succession of episcopacy and sacramental priesthood is an essential and constitutive, and therefore obligatory, element of the church's very existence. The Orthodox Church, by her inner conviction and consciousness, has a special and exceptional position in the divided Christendom, as the bearer of, and the witness to, the tradition of the ancient undivided Church, from which all existing denominations stem, by the way of reduction and separation.

From the Orthodox point of view, the current ecumenical endeavor can be characterized as "ecumenism in space," aiming at agreement between various denominations, as they exist at present. This endeavor is, from the Orthodox point of view, quite inadequate and incomplete. The common ground,

or rather the common background of existing denominations, can be found and must be sought in the past in their common history, in that common ancient and apostolic tradition from which all of them derive their existence. This kind of ecumenical endeavor can be properly denoted as “ecumenism in time.”¹ The core of this self-definition of Orthodox identity has been repeated on many occasions.²

The two parallel ecclesiological approaches created strange situations. On the one hand, the Orthodox delegates fully participated in the discussions during the great ecumenical gatherings and brought their comments and input which were included in the final documents. One could trace very easily the Orthodox contributions in different documents. The problem that emerged was linked to ecclesiology: the term “Church” was used in such final documents as a generic, inclusive term. In other words, it implied also the inclusion of the Orthodox into that reality that together with all the other members of the WCC formed the Body of Christ—the Church. Seen from that very perspective the Orthodox felt reduced to the level of a denomination among other denominations, included in the theological system of the “branch theory” that they strongly rejected. For such a primary reason, among others, one should understand why at almost all the major ecumenical meetings, the Orthodox came in the end with a separate statement.

On the other hand the documents which tried to integrate the two ecclesiological perspectives came out as contradictory and most confusing. Some paragraphs seemed to contradict other paragraphs of the same document. Such situations led some of the inexperienced Orthodox, those involved in anti-ecumenical campaign to speak about “ecumenist double speak: the ecclesiological schizophrenia of the Orthodox ecumenists” or about “ecumenism as an ecclesiological heresy.”³ Such united efforts produced great divisions and confusions in some local Orthodox churches. As a result, some left the WCC. Others are under pressure from their own faithful to leave as well. It must be stressed again: It is not necessarily the WCC’s fault for its structure or

agenda, although those have contributed as well to such decisions. The main problem is an ecclesiological one. How can one be a church which confesses to be the *Una Sancta* also be an equal member with other denominations in a fellowship of churches? For many, such a membership is a contradiction in terms, a denial of the authentic Orthodox Ecclesiology.

Yet despite problems and hardships at the local levels, most of the Orthodox churches continue to be open and fully committed to the ecumenical dialogue. Still the question remains: If the Orthodox Church holds the opinion that she is the *Una Sancta* and is aware of her apostolic identity, why and for which reasons is she still participating in the Ecumenical Movement? The answer comes from the most profound core of her theology and spirituality.

The inner ecumenical identity of the Orthodox Church

The Orthodox Church is not a confession—one of many, one among many. For the Orthodox, the Orthodox Church is just the Church.

The Orthodox Church is ecumenical by her very being. As the Body of Christ she confesses to be the Church of the whole. Her catholicity is not expressed as the sum of the different parts, but as the expression of the fullness. Witnessing to and living the

fullness of Christ, she believes to be in continuity of communion and faith with the Church of the Apostles throughout time.

Ecclesiology is closely and intimately related to the chapter of *pneumatology*. It belongs to and is related to the work of the Holy Spirit. While during His life Christ spoke to the Apostles and to the people who surrounded him and had communion with them “face to face,” from the day of Pentecost through the descent of the Holy Spirit, Christ is interiorized, lives, acts and speaks from within the Apostles and from within the people who received the Holy Spirit and have been baptized. There is a two-way process: Christ is being interiorized, but also the people are integrated into the Body of Christ, grafted into His Mystical Body.

As a result the life of the whole Trinity flows in the veins of the people incorporated in Christ. The whole Trinity indwells, through the grace of the Holy Spirit, a human being: “Those who love me will keep

my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.” (John 14:23) Or in Ephesians 2:21-22, “In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you are also together spiritually built into a dwelling place of God.” Therefore, in short it could be summarized that the Church is the communion of humanity and the whole of creation with God the Trinity through Christ in the Holy Spirit. It has many descriptive names: people of God (Tit 2:14, 1 Peter 2:9); Body of Christ (Romans 12:5; 1 Cor. 12), temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19), the bride of Christ (Rev. 21:1-9; Ephesians 5), true vine (John 15), shepherd and his sheep (John 10), etc.

The Church is a theanthropic reality.

It has both a divine and human element. It is a continuation through the Holy Spirit of the Mystery of Incarnation, of the hypostatic union, of the communion between God and His creation by the full assumption of it within Godself. The communion is real, not symbolic. Mary is often used as example of what the Church is meant to be: the interiorization of Christ, full life in and with God. Mary is used as image of the Church and is even called in hymns “sanctified church” as she bore the very Son of God within herself. St. Symeon the New Theologian, speaking about the role and work of the Holy Spirit, said that like Mary we are also called to let Christ grow within ourselves in a very real, mystical way. That reality was clearly expressed from as early as second century by using terminologies such as *theophoros*, *christophoros*, *pneumatoforos*, *theosis*, etc.

The Cosmic Christ and the “pre-existent church.”

The Fathers and the Early Church writings (for instance the Shepherd of Hermas and others later on in history) spoke about the pre-existent Church (*that old woman with grey hairs but with a young face and look*). As communion of God, humans and creation, the pre-existent “church” started in the Garden of Eden. Through the sin of the first humans, the communion was disrupted and had its consequences which the estrangement from God, the source of life implies. It continued in a certain way within the elected people of Israel and was even a “church” of the gentiles. This seems to be the hidden mystery for

ages discovered in Christ through whom we have access to the Father (Ephesians 3:8-11).⁴

The identity of Jesus as the incarnated Logos of God as described in the Gospel of John, chapter 1, had tremendous implications on the way the Early Church has approached other cultures and religions. The development of this theology starting with the Apologists in the second century became central for the self-definition of Christian identity within the multicultural and multi-religious contexts of those times and later. This theology which was inherited and is still lives within the Orthodox Church, has shaped the whole of the missionary ethos and put the basis for the specific theological approach to the people of other faiths.⁵ *Clement of Alexandria (150-215)* wrote that: “Greek philosophy was a preparatory training for Christ”—*propaideia tes en Cristo anapauseos*.⁶

As the Law was for the Jews, so the philosophy became for the Greeks in the divine plan of salvation “*schoolmaster to Christ*” *paidagogos eis Hriston*.⁷ In the non-Christian world there were present “*sparks of the logos*” (*enausmata tou logou*); even the truth within the history of religion in antiquity came directly from God. He mentions then many teachers from among the Greeks such as: Theophrastos, Aristotle, Mithrodors, Epicures, Plato, Socrates, Pythagoras; but also from among the wise of Egypt, India, Babylon, all their astrologists and concludes: “*But since there is but One uncreated being, the Almighty God, and only One who was before all and through whom all was made and without whom nothing was made, then He is the teacher of all created things*.”⁸

For Origen (185-254) the philosophers’ views help us to better understand the Scriptures. Like the Old Testament stories, the Greek myths present profound truths in allegorical narrative forms. (*Kata Kelsou, 4:38*) The same approaches will be used in the later centuries by many of the Church Fathers. Up to this day, the wise people of other faiths preceding Christ, such as those mentioned in the writing of the apologists, are being painted on the outside walls of the churches, among other “Christian” saints. Usually, they point with their fingers to the doors of the Church as the ones who through the assistance and work of the same Holy Spirit who worked in the Old Testament prophets “prepared the way” to Christ.

The marks of the Church

The Nicene–Constantinopolitan Creed (elaborated in 325 and 381) states that the Church is “one, holy, catholic and apostolic.”

The Church is *One* because one is the head of which she is the body (Eph. 4:4–6). There is one Lord, one faith, one Baptism. The ones is a given, is a gift of God. As a historical institution, as an “oikodomia” a building up is also a call and vocation to conform to and express that gift. Unity is not something that we realize—but we only express the visible unity. The Church is indivisible; it cannot be split despite human errors or efforts to destroy it. The Church is one and will remain one.

The Church is *Holy* because her head, Jesus Christ, and the whole Trinity which inhabits the Church through the Holy Spirit is Holy. It is not the “holiness” of the people that gives holiness to the Church. The sins of the members do not affect the holiness of the being of the Church; rather they are cutting off themselves from the trunk of the living tree by their own acts. The Church is and remains holy. The members of the Church could be the ones considered sinful. The grace of God shines and operates fully and without restrictions in the Church despite the sinfulness of the people. It is expressed in particular at the beginning of the Eucharistic Liturgy and during it when the priest or the bishop pray saying: “Do not stop because of our sins the coming of Thy Holy Spirit on the people and on the gifts here set forth.”

The Church is *Apostolic*, as it is built on the basis laid by the Apostles, of their faith in Christ who is the same “yesterday, and today and forever.” (Hebrews 13:8) The Apostolicity or the apostolic succession is expressed by the communion in the faith of the Apostles and of the apostolic communities in the early Church and in history but also by the communion in the uninterrupted chain of ordinations which should be linked to that of the Apostles. Both of the elements are equally important. One cannot be apostolic by ordination alone if one is no longer within the apostolic communion of faith. Neither is confession of

apostolic faith alone fully apostolic without the element of the historic “laying of hands.”

The Church is *Catholic*. For the Orthodox Theology and praxis, this term has been used with the meaning of fullness, integrity, completeness. “Universality” could be a part of it but does not faithfully reflect or express its meaning. *Kata + holon* means *according to all*. The truth and the life are in community not in solitude and separation. The term is found but once in the New Testament, in the book of Acts (4:18) “not to speak *at all*.” Historically, the Church started to use it from the second century onwards, in particular related to the specific circumstance of those times.⁹

The catholicity is holistic, horizontal and vertical, enveloping time and space. Therefore, in the Church God and humanity meet together in the communion of prayer and love, with both the living and the dead, with the angels and all of His creation. Death does not amputate a person, does not ungraft it from the Body of Christ. It will remain there, but in another level of existence, waiting for the resurrection of the dead and the life to come. In the Liturgy the heaven and the earth meet and celebrate together. The iconography in the Orthodox churches clearly express that reality.

Fullness, wholeness and integrity also refers to the fact that the Church is necessarily composed of clergy and laity, old and young, male and female, of all colors and from the whole of the cosmos. Laity have a vital role. Without laity a Eucharistic liturgy, for instance, cannot be celebrated in the Orthodox Church. If there is not at least one lay person present, the *epiclesis* cannot happen, the Holy Spirit cannot be invoked.

On the other hand, the faith expressed by the Church is also to be catholic as it is important to be in full communion with the Church throughout time and space. The Patristic witnesses as evidence of the faith in history are crucially important.¹⁰ It is known, however, that not everything that the “fathers” said has been kept by the Church as “the faith.” Many elements have been avoided or even clearly rejected

Unity is not something that we realize—we only express the visible unity. The Church is indivisible; it cannot be split despite human errors or efforts to destroy it.

(Trinitarian ambiguities in the Apostolic Fathers, hiliarism in St. Gregory of Nyssa, etc.) The criteria was that expressed by *Vincens of Leryn* in the 5th century. In his *Commonitorium* he said around 450, "Within the catholic Church itself the greatest care must be taken that we hold that which has been believed everywhere, always, and by all. For this is truly and properly catholic, as the very force and effect of the word declares, which includes all things with practical universality. But this will be found precisely in this way, if we follow that which is universal, that which is ancient, and that about which there is consent." Or precisely this is what the Orthodox Church is holding.

The Orthodox Church witnesses to the ecumenical affirmations of the apostolic faith.

She is "ecumenical." It relies on the ecumenical decisions of the early undivided Church. *She is the Church of the seven ecumenical councils.* To this point it is important to mention again the role of the Church as a whole in making decisions and in expressing the truth or the orthodoxy of faith. There are only seven ecumenical councils because only these councils were accepted by the "oikoumene." All the others, many of them, although with the pretention to be ecumenical were not accepted as such because "the Church" as a whole did not sanction them. For such reason the Nicene Constantinopolitan Creed became the symbol of faith of the Orthodox Church. Although the other early creeds such as the Apostolic creed or the Athanasian Creed are Orthodox in content and form, they are not in use in the liturgical life of the Church. Those are particular, not ecumenical. Orthodoxy stands on ecumenical expressions of the apostolic faith. The Orthodox Church is ecumenical in its very being.

For such reasons, even in the Ecumenical Movement it is clearly affirmed that the Orthodox Church is not a confessional Church. It is not a confession among other confessions. Attempts to write confessions of faith, the so-called "Orthodox symbolic books" were done much later and in the very specific circumstances of the 17th and 18th centuries in particular. Although interesting from an historical perspective, they did not capture and express the Orthodox faith in its fullness and integrity. Trying to respond either to Catholic or Protestant proselytist actions, they have become themselves expressions of

rigid scholasticism, with formulations which show at times either Catholic or Protestant influences.¹¹ At present many Orthodox scholars trying to rediscover the authentic ecumenical ethos of the Orthodox Church speak about this period of formulations foreign to Orthodoxy as "the Babylonian captivity of Orthodox theology." (Fr. Florovsky, Yannaras, etc.)

The ecumenical dimension of Orthodoxy is clearly expressed not only in its theology but also in its liturgical life and in its spirituality. The litany for the "union of all" is a constant prayer in all services of the Orthodox Church. The eucharistic offerings are brought "for the whole world" (St. John Chrisostomos) and is remembered as "the holy Catholic and Apostolic Church from one part to the other of the whole world." (St. Basil the Great)

Therefore, the Orthodox Church is ecumenical by its very nature. It holds, affirms and witnesses to the apostolic faith of the oikoumene. For this reason from its very beginning it became involved in the Ecumenical Movement which attempts to rediscover the visible unity of the Church of Christ. The search for unity is for Orthodoxy an ontological vocation. It is not a matter of Church strategy, political diplomacy and relationship building. It is first of all a matter of deep faith.

The Church and the churches: The nature of the relation between the Orthodox Church and the other churches and confessions

The international and bilateral theological dialogues have made essential progress in the *rapprochement* between divided churches. Theological positions which in the past seemed irreconcilable are nowadays overcome. Through dialogue and common efforts some of the classical and historical antagonisms now belong to the past, and the churches from within the WCC reached an important degree of convergence in their witness to the world. And in this process the Orthodox Church has also played a vital role.¹²

The ecclesiology, however, even after 50 years of ecumenical dialogues has remained until today a delicate and neuralgic issue. The Faith and Order Commission is making efforts today for the elaboration of a possible convergent document on ecclesiology.¹³

During all this time the Orthodox Church has continued to affirm the belief in its identity with the

one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. On the other hand, the Orthodox theologians seem to have avoided dealing openly with the issue of their ecclesial relationship with the Christians of other churches and confessions. If the Orthodox Church is identical with the Church witnessed to in the Nicene Constantinopolitan creed, who are the other Christians, and what is the nature of their relationship with the Orthodox Church? To this question the Orthodoxy of our times does not have a unique and coherent answer—thus creating at times confusions and *pro* and *anti* attitudes vis-a-vis the participation in the Ecumenical Movement.

The Orthodox theologians from the Diaspora, in particular those of Russian origin, being confronted with the reality of cohabitation as a minority among the Christians of other confessions, have preferred to use the agnostic sentence, “We know where the Church is (the Orthodox Church), but we do not know where she is not.” The first one who has dared to deal with the delicate issue of the “limits of the Church” was Father George Florovsky who published an article in 1933 entitled “The Limits of the Church.”¹⁴ The merit of this article is that it identifies the issue, asks questions, proposes the reconsideration of the position of Augustin on the charismatic limits of the Church in the light of the positions of the Greek Fathers, but remains still within a more descriptive and general frame without giving a clear answer on the nature of the relationship between the Christians of other confessions and the Orthodox Church. The very few Orthodox theologians who have followed the example of Father Florovsky and tried to deal afresh with the same issue have also remained within the sphere of a more generic, general and descriptive approach without giving a clear, coherent and theologically convincing answer.¹⁵

Contemporary theological positions show diversity

The diversity of the ecclesiological discourse in the contemporary Orthodox theology is expressed both by contradictory positions vis-a-vis the Ecumenical Movement as well as within the liturgical and pastoral field when one has to deal with mixed marriages or with the reception of Christians of other confessions in the Orthodox Church. The different

ecclesiological positions can be structured in three general categories:

1. Following the *acrvia* of St. Cyprian¹⁶ and of certain Apostolic Canons¹⁷ there are a minority of theologians, priests and especially monks who hold the opinion that there is no salvation outside the Church and that the Holy Spirit does not work but within the Church. For this reason any sacrament celebrated outside the Church (Orthodox Church) is void of grace, and those who would like to join the Orthodox Church must be re-baptized. For those following this ecclesiological direction, ecumenism is considered to be an “ecclesiological heresy.” Consequently these people accuse the Orthodox who participate in the Ecumenical Movement of “ecclesiological schizophrenia” because while affirming that the Orthodox Church is the *Una Sancta*, they seem to also accept that the Christians of other confessions belong to this sacramental reality.
2. The second category follows the line of patristic synthesis elaborated in the 4th century by St. Basil the Great.¹⁸ St. Basil does not look globally to those outside the Orthodox Church but brings certain nuances and places them in different categories: a) *heretics*: those who differ in their faith in God such as Manichaiens, Gnostics, Marcionites. These have to be rebaptized, as the very God that they have confessed is different from the God confessed by the Church. b) *schismatics*: those who have separated themselves from the Church for internal reasons which could be solved by dialogue; c) *parasinagogs* or dissidents who came into being by opposition to church authority.

Both the schismatics and the dissidents “are still of the Church” and must be received without rebaptising them again. Later canon 95 of the Council in Trullo (692) identifies three ways of reception for those separated from the Church—by confession of faith, chrismation and rebaptism. This ecclesiological direction, with its liturgical and pastoral consequences, has been the most accepted and practiced by the majority of Orthodox churches, with some exceptions due to the certain difficult historical contexts. The general practice is that one who has been baptized in the name of the Trinity is

to be received into the Orthodox Church by chrismation without rebaptism.

After the Great Schism of 1054, it was only in 1484 that a council in Constantinople decided that Western Christians who wanted to join the Orthodox Church would be received by chrismation. An the prayers which were to be said on that occasion show clearly that this service was not considered a repetition of the sacrament of chrismation (confirmation) but was rather a service of reintegration into the Church, and the prayers had a penitential character. In 1667 another council held in Moscow for the Russian Orthodox Church had similar decisions. The 18th century was a very difficult historical period for the Orthodox churches as it was

confronted with the emerging “missionary” proselytistic activities both from the Protestant and from the Roman Catholic churches. In such a new and very particular situation the attitude of the Orthodox Church vis-a-vis the other Confessions changed. The council of 1755 in Constantinople had required that all the Western Christians who wanted to be received into the Orthodox Church be received by rebaptism. Though the councils of 1875 and 1880 held also in Constantinople came back to the practice of chrismation, the decision of the council in 1755 requiring rebaptism has not been abrogated. For this reason in most cases it is the decision of the local priest to determine how to receive a non-Orthodox into the Orthodox Church. And such a decision is very much related to the relationships held by churches in the local context.

3. The third ecclesiological direction is expressed around the term “*sacramental economy*.” Wishing to remain faithful to the rigid line of St. Cyprian and thus to give satisfaction to the Orthodox fundamentalist groups, but at the same time desiring to show certain openness to those outside the Orthodox Church according to the example of St. Basil and to the practice of the Church during history, there are certain contemporary Orthodox theologians who hold

the following: The Church is one and this is the Orthodox Church. Those outside the Orthodox Church, even if they were baptized in the name of the Trinity, cannot be considered members of the Church as long as they do not “return” to the Orthodox Church. When they decide to join the Orthodox Church, the Church recognizes their baptism through “economy,” and rebaptism is not required. But as long as they are away from the Orthodox Church, such baptism cannot be recognized as sufficient baptism in any way. Such a position tries to avoid the possibility of recognizing any sign of ecclesiality outside the Orthodox Church.

Though interesting at first look, this

ecclesiological position, relatively new in the history of the Orthodox Church,¹⁹ created more problems than solutions to the ecumenical dilemma. Such a position is contrary to Orthodox Theology and in particular to its liturgical practices. I will give two examples. First I will quote from the prayer that the priest is to say during the service of reception into the Orthodox faith “a Roman Catholic or others.” Before the chrismation, as the baptism is not repeated, the

priest prays, “You Master, Lover of humankind, look to your servant (Name), *who is a sheep of Your flock...* humbly I pray: fulfill in his/her heart the light of the grace of Your Holy Spirit, to the true knowledge of Your Holy Gospels. Light in him/her the light of the saving baptism *which inhabits his/her soul...* towards the accomplishment of Your precepts.”²⁰

The second example refers to the liturgical practices concerning the sacrament of matrimony for mixed families. There are some Orthodox priests belonging to the line of acrivia who will require that the non-Orthodox person should be received into the Orthodox Church before the sacrament of matrimony is celebrated. But the practice generally accepted by most of the Orthodox churches is that since one of the two is Orthodox, the Orthodox priest could celebrate the sacrament of matrimony

Confronted with the reality of cohabitation as a minority among the Christians of other confessions, some have preferred to use the agnostic sentence, “We know where the Church is (the Orthodox Church), but we do not know where she is not.”

according to the Orthodox Liturgical Tradition with the condition that the non-Orthodox person was baptized in the name of the Trinity. The question thus remains still unsolved. If even the baptism in the name of the Trinity has no ecclesial significance outside the Orthodox Church, how could an Orthodox sacrament be administered to one who is outside the canonical borders of the Orthodox Church?

Christ gathers to himself the whole creation.

Among the modern Orthodox theologians, deeply appreciated and accepted by the Orthodox churches worldwide, who dared to approach openly such a delicate issue was the late Father Dumitru Staniloae. Although he did not intend to write an “ecumenical theology,” his theology is profoundly ecumenical because it remained authentic to the wholeness of Orthodox Tradition and spirituality. Christ, the Divine Logos, whom Father Staniloae put at the center of his theology, is the Reason of the whole of creation. Through Christ, the incarnated Logos, God has created the whole world. By Incarnation, Christ gathers in himself the whole of creation saving and “divinizing” it potentially by his saving work. Christ did not come to save only a part of creation, but the whole cosmos. The Church, the Body of Christ, actualized in the world by the power and work of the Holy Spirit has also a cosmic dimension, being open to the whole of creation. The Orthodox Church, having the integrity of the apostolic faith and the grace of the Sacraments, shares in the fullness of the union and communion with Christ. But even other Christians, despite their separation from the Orthodox Church and despite their partial witness to the Apostolic Faith, are not completely outside of this sacramental Mystery which is the Body of Christ, the Church. Because there is One Church, as there is one Christ, one head and one body, all Christians belong to the same reality, the only difference being the level of their participation in that reality.

Christ cannot have many bodies organically extended out of His personal Body and cannot have many brides. Any full union of the faithful with Christ cannot mean but an intimate, integral and working presence within them. And this union alone is the Church. But then comes the following

question: What are the other Christian confessions who do not witness to such an intimate and working union of the integral Christ within them? We believe that they are less full churches, some closer to this fullness, some more far from it... The Orthodox teaching and Tradition makes us consider that all the non-Orthodox confessions are separations which came into being in a certain relation with the full Church and exist in a certain relation with her, but they do not share in the fullness of the light and power of Christ. Therefore, in a certain way the Church comprises all the confessions separated from her because those could not separate themselves fully from the Tradition present in her.”²¹ The Christians of other confessions are not “completely outside this mystery (Church)... These will find themselves in the less illuminated, less transparent of the many mansions of the heavenly Father (John 14:2).”²²

On the basis of such an ecclesiology with cosmic dimensions which goes beyond the strict canonical limits, Father Staniloae has launched already in 1971 the notion of “*open conciliarity or catholicity*,” pleading for the rediscovery and re-implementation of the old practice of the Church of universal *koinonia* within which the whole of Christendom is asked to bring its contribution. The open catholicity offers the promise of understanding between the churches by harmonization of unilateral decisions adopted in time by the churches in order to mutually exclude one another and by the rediscovery of a more supple and overarching unity which accepts the pluralism and the diversity of understanding without ending in uniformity.

To this contemporary actualization of the totality of the Christian teaching held in principle by Orthodoxy, are also called to bring their contributions the Traditions of other Christian confessions, even if those did retain less aspects of it or have emphasized too exclusively others from within the totality of the spiritual and divino-human reality of Christianity... The Orthodox catholicity (conciliarity) from our time must enrich itself with the spiritual values lived by the

Western Christians. Because due to the fact that these Christians have retained less aspects of the Christians teaching or have emphasized some of them to a greater extent, helped them to deepen them more profoundly....²³

By living the open catholicity, Christians enrich reciprocally by mutual criticism and life experiences which they witness to one another,²⁴ preparing thus the way towards the realization of Christian unity.

Therefore, Orthodoxy is ecumenical in its very identity and has an ecumenical vocation. To be concerned about and committed to the realization of Christian unity as response to the prayer of Christ before his Passions “that all may be one” (John 17) and out of feeling of guilt vis-a-vis the sin of division is not a matter of choice, and it does not belong but an elite or special people. Such concern and commitment belong to the very Orthodox identity. He who will stop praying for the “unity of all” is denying his very Orthodox identity because, according to Father Staniloae, “one cannot avoid seeing in the apparition and work of the Ecumenical Movement the work of God.”²⁵

The salvific and redemptive work of Christ both during the time of his earthly life and after by the power of the Holy Spirit in and through His sacramental Body, the Church, has a cosmic dimension. The Holy Spirit cannot be contained within the canonical borders of any ecclesial identity. All those who belong to Christ belong to one degree or another to his Mystical Body, the Church, as well. The member churches of the WCC came together as a fellowship of churches on a very solid theological basis. Though there are differences of details which still separate them, the God they witness and pray to is one and the same: “Jesus Christ as God and Saviour according to the Scriptures...to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.” We the Orthodox might continue to affirm that the Orthodox Church is the *Una Sancta* as it has kept more integrally the fullness of the Apostolic Faith throughout centuries. But in order to be faithful, coherent and accountable to our theology, we must have the courage to say that the other churches of the WCC fellowship, as they came together in fellowship

by fully accepting and affirming its very theological basis, are also a part of the Body of Christ, though the level of their participation to it might be different. In fact the famous encyclical letter of the Ecumenical Patriarch of 1920 considered to be a pioneer piece of ecumenical endeavor is addressed “Unto the churches of Christ Everywhere.”²⁶ But such and affirmation is far from accepting or promoting the branch theory of the parity of confessions either.

Apostolic faith within a plurality of identities and expressions

In the light of the above theology Christian unity as viewed by the Orthodox Church is not an idealistic and utopian expectation that all the other churches may one day enter the canonical borders of the Orthodox Church and become Orthodox in the sense of confessional family where unity may lead to uniformity. The Orthodox Church has never expected the “return” of the other historical separated entities within its realm. What the Orthodox is expecting is that one day all churches may find one another within the full *koinonia* and witness to the integral nature of the Apostolic faith while keeping a plurality of particular identities and expressions as experienced even today among the many Orthodox churches. In that process of rediscovery and recovery we need one another to witness, to challenge, to constructively critique, to assist, support and help. That goal and expectation has been expressed already as early as 1961 in New Delhi:

No static restoration of old forms is anticipated, but rather a dynamic recovery of perennial ethos, which only can secure the true agreement “of all ages.” Nor should there be a rigid uniformity, since the same faith, mysterious in its essence and unfathomable adequately in the formulas of human reason, can be expressed accurately in different manners. The immediate objective of the ecumenical search is, according to the Orthodox understanding, a reintegration of Christian mind, a recovery of apostolic tradition, a fullness of Christian vision and belief, in agreement with all ages.²⁷

Notes

- 1 Cf. *Orthodox Visions of Ecumenism, Statements, Messages and Reports of the Ecumenical Movement 1902-1992*, compiled by Gennadios Limouris, WCC Publications, Geneva, 1994, p.30-31.
- 2 Consultation on Orthodox Involvement in the World Council of Churches, Sofia 1981; Decisions of the Third Preconciliar Pan-Orthodox Conference on the Orthodox Church and the Ecumenical Movement, Chambesy 1986; InterOrthodox Consultation of Orthodox WCC Member Churches on The Orthodox Churches and the World Council of Churches, Chambesy 1991 and most recently at the meeting in Thessaloniki, 1998.
- 3 As example, I will mention just some of the many titles that could be easily found on the internet: *The Heresy of Ecumenism and the Patristic Stand of the Orthodox*; *Ecumenism as an ecclesiological heresy*; *An ecclesiological Position Paper for Orthodox Opposed to the Pan-Heresy of Ecumenism*; *Ecumenist "double speak": The Ecclesiological Schizophrenia of the Orthodox Ecumenists*; *The price of Ecumenism: How ecumenism has hurt the Orthodox Church*; *Orthodoxy and Fundamentalism: the fundamentalism of the Orthodox Ecumenists*; *Holy Canons and Patristic Quotes related to Ecumenism*. Books of this kind, have been translated and spread more recently among Orthodox people in the countries of Eastern Europe in particular.
- 4 St. John Chrisostmos calls the Church "bride" and Christ "bridegroom." At His coming into the world, Christ, the bridegroom, finding his bride—the Church, dirty, naked and defiled by blood, He washes, anoints and feeds her" (*Expositio in Psalm 5*, no.2, *Patrologia Graeca*, t.55, col.63. St. Gregory of Nyssa says that the Word (Jesus) calls the Church saying: "Raise up the fallen one in the mud of sins and chained by the snake and fallen on the earth," *In Cantica Canticorum, Homilia 5*, *Patrologia Graeca*, t.44, col. 868A.
- 5 As early as 1971, during the Central Committee of the WCC, Metropolitan Georges Khodr of Lebanon, gave a paper entitled "Christianity in a Pluralistic World – The Economy of the Holy Spirit" (see in *The Ecumenical Movement: An Anthology of Key Texts and Voices*, edited by Michael Kinnamon and Brian E. Cope, WCC Publications, Geneva, 1997, p.401-406. It was received with puzzlement by many of the Central Committee participants of that time.
- 6 *Stromata I*,5
- 7 *ibidem*
- 8 *Stromata 6*,7
- 9 In the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 8,1: "the whole Catholic Church throughout the inhabited world (the oikoumene). Or in St. Ignatius, *Letter to the Smyrnaeans* 8,2: "Wherever Christ is, there is the catholic Church." By 150 it started to be used to define the true apostolic Church from the schismatic bodies – Gnostics, Donatists. St. Cyril of Jerusalem around 350, in his *Catechetical lectures (18)* said: "The Church is called catholic because it is spread throughout the world, from end to end of the earth; also because it teaches universally and completely all the doctrines which man should know concerning things visible and invisible, heavenly and earthly; and also because it subjects to right worship all mankind, rulers and ruled, lettered and unlettered; further because it treats and heals universally every sort of sin committed by soul and body, and possesses in itself every conceivable virtue, whether in deeds, words or in spiritual gifts of every kind."
- 10 The search for catholicity in time is not only an Orthodox and Roman Catholic concern. The Early Reformers were aware of this dimension of the early Church and had deep appreciation for the Fathers, in particular Calvin. The idea was to rediscover the Apostolic roots of the Church; for this reason he has used many quotations from the Fathers. Luther and Melanchton did the same. Luther has declared: "The Fathers and the doctors like Augustin, Jeronimus, Hilare, Bonaventure etc. must be given much honour because of their faith testimonies, by which they show that the ancient Church believed in Jesus Christ." Melanchton had a humanist education and appreciated much the Fathers using them for apologetical reasons: they interpreted correctly the Scriptures; the Church of Rome went away; Reformation is in continuation with the Ancient Church. The *Augsbourg Confession* starts with the decree of Nicea; in chapter IV is mentioned the authority of the Symbol of the Apostles. In chapter VI is quoted from St. Ambrosius to support the idea of salvation by faith. In order to show how the Church of Rome is no longer in continuity with the Early Church are used quotations from the Fathers: communion only with bread, celibacy of priests, monastic vows etc. (*chapter 23,24,25,27,28*). Calvin follows the same logic. In the fourth book of his *Christian institutions*, he defends the authority of the councils against those who

- think that is up to them to accept or to reject their decisions:” If anyone will ask if the resolutions of the councils have no authority at all, I would say that yes, they have . . . we accept happily the councils such as those of Nicea, Constantinople, first of Ephesus, Chalcedon and the similar ones which took place to condemn the wrong mistakes and opinions of the heretics; we give them, let’s say, honour and reverence . . . Because these councils do not contain anything else but a pure and natural interpretation of the Scriptures . . . And in fact, the Fathers who attended the council of Chalcedon, did not take their decision but through the Word of God. Nevertheless, we follow them with the condition that we have the word of God enlightening us; according to which they were also led.” (IV,9,8; IV,9,9), cf. André Benoît, *L’actualité des Pères de l’Eglise*, Editions Delachaux & Niestlé, Neuchatel, 1961, p.17-21.
- 11 For example, under the name of Cyril Lukaris, patriarch of Constantinople, murdered in 1638, has been published a Calvinist Confession of faith in Latin in 1629 and in Greek in 1633. It affirms predestination, salvation by faith alone, two sacraments, spiritual presence of Christ in Eucharist. It was rebuked in 1638 by a synod in Constantinople. Another example is the symbolic book of *Peter Moghila*, the Metropolitan of Kiev who elaborated the “*Orthodox Confession of the Catholic and Apostolic Church of the East*.” It has been approved by the Synod of Iassi, 1642. It is also very scholastic. It had to be reviewed since initially had in mentioned the purgatorium and the moment of epiclesis at the pronouncement of the words of institution. The formula of absolution, which is in use until today in the Slavonic Tradition, has also strong scholastic connotations (*Book of needs*). Another clear example is the Confession of *Dositei of Jerusalem* written in 1672. It had in it the scholastic term *transsubstantiatio*, which had to be revised later.
- 12 The introduction of the Trinitarian dimension in the WCC basis, the debates on Scripture, Tradition and traditions, on the role of the Holy Spirit, on the relationship between local and catholic Church, on the theological foundations for the dialogue with people of other faiths are just few examples of the particular Orthodox contributions to the ecumenical dialogues.
- 13 The first draft of the document entitled “*The nature and the purpose of the Church*” has been sent for study to the WCC member churches. On the basis of the responses from the churches, a new revised document will be elaborated and will be presented for adoption to the 9th General Assembly of WCC in Porto Alegre, Brazil, in 2006.
- 14 In *Church Quarterly Review*, vol.II7, 1933, p.II7-131
- 15 For a summary of the positions of different contemporary Orthodox Theologians on this issue, see Prof. Emanuel Clapsis, “The Boundaries of the Church: An Orthodox Debate,” in *Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, vol. 35, no.2, 1990, p.II3-127.
- 16 *Epistles 69,7; 71,1; 73,2; 75,17*
- 17 *Canon 45(46)* etc.
- 18 *Epistle 188*
- 19 The use of the notion “sacramental economy” with the understanding its has until today is linked to the great personality of St. Nicodemus of Holy Mountain (1748-1809). In his work *Pedalion* (1800), St. Nicodemus reintroduces the old canonical terminologies “*acrivia*” and “*economy*” but giving them a new nuance compared to the meaning these notions had in the Early Church. He was a great supporter of the council of Constantinople in 1755 and of the ecclesiological line of St. Cyprian. Very soon, the Greek speaking Orthodoxy has borrowed and used his newly defined canonical terminology. The sacramental economy came to be understood as a kind of retroactive recognition of the validity of certain sacraments done outside the Orthodox Church but which in reality they were invalid and void of grace when celebrated outside the Church. Although this term has been adopted and used in the late orthodox canonical language, it has to be stressed that this new understanding was an innovation at that time and is not in continuity with the canonical prescriptions of the Early Church. On the other hand, the acceptance without discernment of this new concept poses serious theological problems. The way it is used, gives the impression that the hierarchy would be entrusted with miraculous charismatic powers on the basis of which it could accept as valid what is invalid and charismatic what in fact has been void of any grace. This mechanical approach, from the Sacramental Orthodox Theology, has no consistence and is even contradictory. It is imperative today to do afresh a profound study on this subject and to articulate it within the realities and challenges of our times. An excellent description on the evolution of this problem in Baptism and

- sacramental economy in *An Agreed Statement of the North American Orthodox-Catholic Theological Consultation*, St. Vladimir's Orthodox Seminary, Crestwood, New York, 1999, cf. Internet: www.usccb.org/seia/agreed.htm, and Michael Stavrou, "L'ecclésialité du baptême des autres chrétiens dans la conscience de l'Église orthodoxe," in *La Maison-Dieu* 235 (2003/3), p.89-123
- 20 *Molitifelnic (Book on Needs)*, Editura Institutului Biblic si de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Romane, Bucuresti, 1992, p.692
- 21 *Teologia Dogmatica Ortodoxa*, vol. 2, Editura Institutului Biblic si de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Romane, Bucuresti, 1978, p.267
- 22 Cf. Dumitru Staniloae, "The Mystery of the Church," in *Church, Kingdom, World, the Church as mystery and prophetic sign*, edited by Gennadios Limouris, Faith and Order Paper no.130, World Council of Churches, Geneva, 1986, p.57; *Dogmatica*, vol. 2, p.269
- 23 "Sobornicitate deschisa," in *Ortodoxia*, no.2, 1971, p.171, 172
- 24 *Ibidem*, p.176
- 25 "Miscarea ecumenica si unitatea crestina in stadiul actual," in *Ortodoxia*, no.3-4, 1963, p.544
- 26 *The Ecumenical Movement: An Anthology of Key Texts and Voices*, p.11-14
- 27 *Orthodox Visions of Ecumenism*, p.31

The Peter Ainslie Lecture on Christian Unity is delivered annually by an internationally recognized ecumenical scholar, and is intended to witness to the vision of Christian unity. Dr. Peter Ainslie III (1867-1934), a distinguished ecumenist, was the minister of Christian Temple, the Disciples congregation in Baltimore, Maryland, and the first president of the Council on Christian Unity. This lecture, inaugurated in 1982, is endowed by the Peter Ainslie Fund and sponsored by the Council on Christian Unity of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).



Professing Christ in an Interfaith World

S. Wesley Ariarajah

SEVENTH JOE A. AND NANCY VAUGHN STALCUP LECTURE
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There is a real sense in which the topic “Professing Christ in an Interfaith World” itself indicates some of the changes that have taken place in our attitude and approach to peoples of other religious traditions over the past several decades. Some twenty years ago we would have formulated the same topic with such statements like, “Evangelization of Non-Christian Peoples” or “Christian Mission to People of Other Religions.” But the topic given to me describes the world as an “interfaith world” and Christian witness as “professing Christ” in such a world. In other words, we are at a stage in history where we want to pause and reflect for a moment both on the nature of the world we live in and of the kind of the Christian witness that is appropriate in that world.

What are some of the changes that have happened in the world that calls for such reflection? Among many possible reasons, I would like to highlight three as perhaps the most significant ones.

Rethinking the objectives of mission

Modern Ecumenical Movement is said to have begun in 1910 at Edinburgh, Scotland, with the first World Mission Conference. One of the best-known Methodist laymen of this country, John R. Mott, was instrumental in calling this event, and the aim of the conference was ‘the evangelization of the world in that generation.’ All the mission agencies and partners in mission fields were called together to pool resources and to develop common

strategies that would enable this process. A vigorous missionary effort followed with the aim of ‘Christianizing’ the whole world.

What has been the result? Much has been achieved. There is a Christian community in almost every part of the world. Much healing and humanization has taken place. Lives have changed. At the same time, there has also been a negative history of mission when political power and coercion accompanied these efforts. But when we look at the overall results, for example in Asia, Mott’s dream of evangelization of the whole world has hardly been achieved in his generation or in the successive ones. For instance, not even 3% of India’s one billion people have accepted the Christian faith; not even 1% of Thailand; not even 1% of Japan. And the list can be continued.

It is not my purpose here to examine the causes of the ‘successes’ and ‘failures’ of missions. But what we must grasp is that in most parts of the world Christians live as tiny minorities among peoples of many religious traditions. Today we have come to the realization that we must learn to live in a religiously plural world. There is an ‘irreducible diversity’ or ‘a persistent plurality’ that should inform our thinking on missions.

Neighbors, not Strangers

Second, during the past several decades a very large number of peoples of all religious traditions have come to settle in parts of the world that have traditionally been Christian. Professor Diana Eck of Harvard recently published a book with the title, *New Religious America*, in which she says that United States has become one of the most religiously diverse

countries in the world. I was first taken aback at this claim because I had thought that India (with Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam and many Tribal religions) was perhaps the most religiously diverse country in the world. But Eck makes an important point. The USA not only has Buddhism but also all its varieties—Sri Lankan, Burmese, Thai, Tibetan, Laotian, Cambodian, Vietnamese, Chinese, Taiwanese, Korean, Japanese and so on, each with its own temples and communities of celebration. Similarly the United States is home to all varieties of Islam, all sects of Hinduism etc. Now we look at peoples from other religious traditions as those with whom we should learn to relate.

A new appreciation of other traditions

Third, in their attempt to relate to peoples of other traditions, Christians have also come to know them better as praying and believing peoples with long spiritual histories. We have come to know their scriptures and spiritual practices and the reality of their religious life has begun to challenge some of the assumptions we have made about God and God's dealings with peoples. There is greater emphasis today on knowing more about other religious traditions and of the need for dialogue as a way of building relationships across the religious barriers. If God has not left Godself without witness in any place and among any people, what sense do we make of the reality of other traditions that see themselves as responses to God's presence in the world?

In the light of these what can professing Christ mean in an interfaith world?

This is of course a complex and difficult subject, and there is no agreement among Christians on what we should make of the reality of other religious traditions. Some continue to believe that as Christians our task is still to preach the Gospel and convert them to our faith because that is what the Bible appears to require of us. They would quote the closing verses of Matthew 28: "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 ..." and would also point to other verses like "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John.14.6), which appear to suggest that an 18th or 19th Century type of missionary outreach is what is appropriate even in our day.

How do we profess Christ in an interfaith world? Perhaps we should begin with another look at what the Bible teaches us about others and God's relationship to them. The traditional missionary approach is built on one of the strands of biblical teachings.

Biblical perspectives on other religions

This is a difficult question to investigate because the biblical material was not written to explore the subject of interfaith relations. It is confessional material of the Jewish and Christian faith communities, and whatever is said about other 'religions' as such has specific historical contexts requiring in-depth analysis. Yet, I believe that if we re-visit the Bible from a pluralistic perspective, we

will find another strand of tradition within the Bible that is quite illuminating on the issue. I would like to make five points on this matter:

God created and cares for all humankind

The Bible begins with the story of creation, not of Jews or Christians, but of the earth and all its peoples. It also says that God continues to care for all creation and that, at the end, God intends to bring all of creation unto Godself. Psalm 24 declares this basic affirmation in beautiful language: "The earth is the Lord's and all its fullness; the world, and all who dwell in it." According to the Bible, there is only one God, no other. All people live by the grace of this one God, who provides for them and sustains them. All humankind is one family under God. This means that God cares for my Hindu, Muslim, and Buddhist neighbors in the same way care is extended to me. This is what we mean when we say, "God is love." It means God's love is available to all whether they

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deserve it or not. No one is outside God's love and protection.

However, the Bible also tells us that the world is not what God intended it to be. There is sin and wickedness, war and violence. The story of the Bible, therefore, is also the story of how God is at work to heal the world and to bring it back to what God intended it to be. Many of the eschatological visions of the Bible show a world in which all peoples and the whole created order are restored to peace and harmony.

God calls people to be witnesses and partakers in God's mission

The Bible also says that God used Moses to bring the Hebrew people out of slavery and made a covenant with them. What is the nature of this covenant? God will be their God, but in return they must live a just and righteous life according to the Teachings (Law) that were given to them through Moses

What is important in this is to note that while God had chosen a group of people to witness to who God was and what God requires of them, God does not abandon the other nations. In the Bible, God is

unequivocally the "God of all nations." The opening chapters of the Book of Amos say that God intends to punish not only Israel and Judah for their sins but also the other 'foreign' nations around them. But God does not relate to them only in judgment. In Chapter 9 we read: "Are you not like the Ethiopians to me, O people of Israel? Did I not bring Israel up from the land of Egypt, and the Philistines from Caphtor and the Arameans from Kir?"

What God seems to intend in the Hebrew Scriptures is not for all peoples to become Jews, but for all of them to walk in ways of righteousness that God intends them to. God does not abolish the plurality of nations and their ways of life, but heals them, so that justice and peace is established among them. So we have this fascinating passage in Isaiah 19:24-25 about nations that have seen themselves as enemies and have been constantly at war with each other: "On that day Israel will be the third with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, whom the Lord of hosts has blessed, saying, 'Blessed be Egypt my

people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my heritage.'"

God's constant concern for other nations often comes to us as a discovery. Peter began his preaching at the Roman centurion Cornelius's home saying, "I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him" (Acts 10:34).

It is of course possible to quote other sections of scripture to show the opposite view than what I have shown above. We cannot win arguments by quoting scriptures because it has many streams of thought and all sayings has specific contexts that is not necessarily ours in our day. But what I do want to show is that the Jewish people then, as also now, never wanted to 'convert' everyone to their own faith. Rather, they believed that their faithfulness to God was tied up with God's mission of bringing the whole world to God.

Jesus' approach to mission

Himself of the Jewish tradition, Jesus appears to have held the Jewish understanding of what mission was all about. He compared the act of witnessing to

the function of the salt, of the leaven in the dough, of the city that is set on the hill, of the seed that is sown, etc. All these images point to a much humbler task than going out to 'win the whole world to Christ.' In the Acts I passage on witnessing, Jesus said, "you shall be my witnesses," indicating the importance of 'being' as a dimension of witness (Acts 1.8).

Clearly Jesus did announce the in-breaking of the Reign of God and spent his life in the mission he was called to do. But what constituted this mission? It was certainly not an attempt to draw people away from the Jewish or other religious traditions of his day or to win numbers for his own group. Rather, Jesus' mission constituted healing all dimensions of peoples' lives—physical, mental, and spiritual—announcing God's love for and acceptance of all people, and challenging them to love God rather than Mammon, the god of wealth and power. In other words, Jesus never spoke against other religions. He spoke, and that very harshly, against our false confidence in riches and power. In his first sermon at Nazareth (Luke 4) this is

There is an 'irreducible diversity' or 'a persistent plurality' that should inform our thinking on missions.

further elaborated in terms of the solidarity with the poor and the oppressed.

It is in the light of these that we ask, “What does professing Christ mean in an interfaith world?” What is the spirituality of witness that is in keeping both with the claims of the Gospel as a message of acceptance and with the life and teachings of Jesus himself?

I would like to make four points:

Confessing with humility

First our witness must be in humility because we do not really know the religious experience of others. If the biblical assertion that God has an ongoing relationship with all God’s creatures is true, our neighbors should be having stories to tell us about their life with God, and God’s life with them. Our witnessing to Christ, therefore, can only be in the context of their ongoing relationship with God. In other words, we confess Christ not because God is absent but because God is present in their lives. Our confession brings new dimensions to that knowledge and experience of God. Surely we cannot ‘take’ God to anyone; all peoples ‘live and move and have their being’ in God. Our humility is based on the realization that while we know in Christ where God is, we do not know where God is not.

Confessing with confidence

Second, as Christians, we confess Christ with confidence because what we have come to know about God in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ is special and is distinct from other experiences. Therefore, we confess our insights and experiences of God in Christ to others as *our own specific witness* to the way God relates to humankind. But the truth of this witness does not depend on others being in error, nor does it nullify other experiences of God. The confidence we have in our confession becomes evident only when it is also ‘seen’ in our lives as individual Christians and as a Christian community. Thus ‘confession’ is not just verbal proclamation. It is a statement made through the life of a confessing community.

Confessing with compassion

Third, our confession of Christ in the context of religious plurality must have the right intentions and goals. Where our intentions are ambiguous others would experience it as a threat. For instance, our profession of Christ, when motivated by the desire to make ‘converts’ and to increase our numbers would only meet with suspicion and resistance. “Two thousand years of Christian love,” said a Jewish scholar, “is enough to make anybody nervous.” But if our approach were based on compassion and solidarity, as Christ’s was, and were about the healing and wholeness of the community, it would be welcome. God does not ask us to ‘convert’ people, but only to be witnesses to what God in Jesus has done among us. Only witnessing is our burden and pleasure; responding to the message is the burden of the hearer. Many misunderstandings about mission can be removed by Christian willingness to leave the issue of conversion to the work of the Holy Spirit.

Confessing with hope

Fourth, our profession of Christ is based on our faith that God loves the world and intends to bring the whole world unto Godself. In Romans 8, Paul talks about the whole creation groaning to be freed from its bondage to decay to participate in the glory of the children of God. God is at mission in the world; we are only the servants of that mission. We know, and we have experienced, God’s offer of salvation in Jesus Christ; but we do not know what other forces are at work in the service of God’s saving love. But we, in Christ, have a firm and living hope that finally God will bring ‘all things to perfection.’ This hope, both for us and for all of creation, is at the heart of our confession. There is much hopelessness and widespread cynicism in the world around us. Hope in the midst of all the hopelessness, or as Peter says in his letter, our readiness “to give an account of the hope that is in us,” is perhaps the strongest confession of Christ in a religiously plural world.

The Joe A. and Nancy Vaughn Stalcup Lecture on Christian Unity is a biennial event that takes place in the North Texas Area, bringing together the challenge of Christian unity in today’s world with the commitment to the theological education of the laity. The lecture, jointly sponsored by the Council on Christian Unity and the School of Theology for the Laity, was inaugurated in 1989, and has continued to provide a meeting place for the local, regional, national and international witness to the oneness of the Church and the interconnectedness of the ecumenical movement. This lecture is made possible through the generosity of Joe A. and Nancy Vaughn Stalcup.

Overcoming Violence The Quest for Christian Unity

Janice Love

ADDRESS PRESENTED AT THE COUNCIL ON CHRISTIAN UNITY
DINNER, GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH
(DISCIPLES OF CHRIST), OCTOBER 19, 2003



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Nineteenth century Hindu mystic and guru, Sri Ramakrishna said, “Religion is like a cow. It kicks but it gives milk, too.”¹ Historian and Catholic scholar R. Scott Appleby documents this “ambivalence of the sacred” in his book on the roots of religious violence and the potential of religious peacemaking.² Ordained Baptist minister and scholar of Islamic studies, Charles Kimball, agrees and reminds us that

The record of history shows that noble acts of love, self-sacrifice, and service to others are frequently rooted in deeply held religious worldviews. At the same time, history clearly shows that religion has often been linked directly to the worst examples of human behavior.³

All religions to varying degrees face this same dilemma, that is, does the witness of their followers demonstrate the power of the “milk,” or alternatively, the potency of the “kick?” Or, perhaps some mix of the two? Sociologist Mark Juergensmeyer studies the complicated relationship between religion and violence and asserts that

...religion is not innocent. But it does not ordinarily lead to violence. That happens only with the coalescence of a peculiar set of circumstances – political, social, and ideological – when religion becomes fused with violent expressions of social aspirations,

personal pride and movements for political change.

Near the end of his book, Juergensmeyer concludes that violence is a display of power.

...it appeals to those who want to make dramatic statements and reclaim public space. In moments of social transition and uncertainty it can simultaneously hold both political currency and religious meaning.⁴

Despite the vivid and horrific displays of violence perpetrated in recent months and years by followers of Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, and other religions, we Christians hold a notorious track record, too. We often fail to acknowledge, much less confess or seek forgiveness for, creating and perpetrating violence in the name of our faith. In comparing Islam to Christianity, for example, the preeminent public scholar of world religions and Methodist clergy, Huston Smith, states: “Objective historians are of one mind in their verdict that, to put the matter minimally, Islam’s record on the use of force is no darker than that of Christianity.”⁵ Kimball agrees that “A strong case can be made... that the history of Christianity contains considerably more violence and destruction than that of most other major religions.”⁶

Whether or not most Christians agree with this assessment of our history, many people of other faiths (or no faith attachment) take it to heart. Indeed, many look upon Christians’ authentic, ardent, and urgent evangelical calls for a conversion to Christ as profoundly and, for some, irreparably tainted by the scandal of our history of violence as Christians. Obviously our Christian “cow” needs to

demonstrate more “milk” and less “kick.” Those of us who know the gift of salvation in Christ must live more clearly and more boldly Jesus’ life-giving message of love, grace, and mercy for all. In this spirit, the World Council of Churches created the Decade to Overcome Violence: Churches Seeking Reconciliation and Peace, 2001–2010.

The DOV works with a very broad definition of violence like that provided by World Health Organization. WHO discusses the nature of violence in four categories: physical, sexual, psychological, and deprivation or neglect.⁷ This evening most of my remarks will focus on war, which in some ways encompasses all four categories. It features physical violence more prominently, however.

When examining the history of war, by all accounts, the 20th century was the most violent in human history. Over 250 wars were fought and about 110 million war-related deaths resulted. Six times as many people died per war in the 20th century compared to the 19th. Furthermore, civilians became the major victims. In the first half of the century, civilians represented about 50 percent of the war-related deaths. By the 1990s, more than 75 percent of the recorded deaths were civilians. A longer time line might help to put these figures in perspective. Since the year 1000, over 147 million people have died due to wars. Of these, 75 percent died in the 20th century and 89 percent died since 1800.⁸ In the face of world history over the last century, one might reasonably ask about this Decade to Overcome Violence, have we in the churches come with too little too late?

When we Americans remember wars, we like to remember World War II because most agree that it was a just war, despite its high costs. Our government was on the right and winning side. But World War II is one out of the 250 fought across the globe by all nations during that century. What about the other 249? If we evaluated decisions to go to war on a cost-benefit calculation that any business might use to assess carefully its performance, we would quickly come to the conclusion that war almost always fails to achieve its goals. For starters, we know that war has a 50 percent failure rate, that is, in every case, at least 50 percent of the sides engaged in battle lose,⁹ but often everyone does. Despite this reality, we too frequently decide that we have no alternative, that war

is the only answer, and that our ideals of peace and justice must be compromised.

By the end of the 20th century, delegates to the 1998 WCC Harare Assembly, like many others in the world, noticed a significant increase in a particularly potent dimension of violence, and that was religion. As the Cold War ended, deadly conflicts erupted or escalated dramatically between and within nations. Many of these were exacerbated, encouraged, or excused by religious authorities or the political manipulation of religious sentiment. Bosnia, Rwanda, Chechnya, Palestine and Israel, among other places, announced anew the destructive and volatile mix of religion and war. Then the horrific attacks of September 11 brought to our soil the terror with which many others in the world had been living for so long. Our turn as an entire nation had come to cope with the loss. Our turn had come to live in fear, uncertainty and insecurity.

From his study of the religious dimensions of war and peace Appleby asserts pointedly that

Intense religious feelings, when exploited by ethnonationalist or other extremist ideologues, *routinely become violent* (emphasis added). The outcome is virtually assured *in the absence of spiritual guides and religious educators* (emphasis added) who are qualified to name such horrific acts as morally wrong, as theologically and spiritually undisciplined – as misconstruals of the sacred.¹⁰

In his study on *Terror in the Mind of God*, Juergensmeyer draws a similar conclusion: The answer to violence committed in the name of religion is simple. We need a greater emphasis on work for peace, justice, and reconciliation in the name of religion. “In a curious way, then,” he says, “the cure for religious violence may ultimately lie in a renewed appreciation for religion itself.”¹¹ Our religious “cows” of Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, etc. need to exhibit much more “milk” and much less “kick.” This would seem to be a “no-brainer” until we actually begin to implement such a recommendation. Then we run into difficulty.

In the Decade to Overcome Violence, if churches want seriously to seek reconciliation and peace, we must put our quest for Christian unity at the heart of what we do. These two missions, creating peace with

justice and pursuing Christian unity, are now and always have been inextricably intertwined. They are also some of the hardest challenges we Christians face.

Throughout the centuries, in the face of very practical and complex conundrums of how to prevent evil from consuming our lives, Christians have created theologies like the just war doctrine to address the situations where self-defense becomes necessary. Liberation theologians adapted the just war tradition to address structural deprivation and the sometime violent struggles of social justice movements. Frequently, as Methodist theologian Stanley Hauerwas points out,¹² some churches tend to take one of the criteria from the just war tradition, that the decision to go to war must be made by a sovereign, legitimate government, to give their own government a “blank check” to conduct war when it will. This comes close to another theological stance, the crusade tradition, where Christians wield the sword as a matter of faith. And, we have the opposite tradition of pacifism, where Christians try to implement the fullness of Jesus’ nonviolent witness.

The just resort to violence continues to be a topic of vigorous debate within the ecumenical movement. The DOV does not seek to resolve this debate. My own personal perspective is that we should not try. Instead, we should live creatively in the tension with which these theological traditions challenge us. The just war tradition, for example, can be useful when debating particular wars like our government’s war against Iraq. More often, in my experience, however, we spend much too much time on almost endless, often sterile discussions about the circumstances under which we, as conscientious Christians, would choose to use violence. I strongly prefer to shift the debate profoundly in the direction of deciding under what circumstances we will choose to work conscientiously for peace with justice. This, I believe, is the more challenging and too often neglected debate and commitment.

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We have a DOV in the WCC because of the careful, hard behind the scenes work done by a number of delegates to the Assembly. Prominent among them were Quakers and Mennonites. The historic peace churches and others committed to the pacifist tradition bring to the Christian family a deep devotion to some of the teachings of Jesus that Huston Smith describes as “earthquake-like.” He characterizes Jesus’ language as simple, concentrated, clear, extravagant and invitational. Jesus’ teachings work with our imagination and our hearts more than our reason or our will, Smith claims. If we are not astonished with Jesus’ stories and prescriptions for our lives, it is

because we have heard Jesus’ teachings so often that their edges have been worn smooth, dulling their subversiveness. If we could recover their original impact, we too would be startled. Their beauty would not cover the fact that they are ‘hard sayings’ for presenting a scheme of values so counter to the usual as to rock us like an earthquake.

We are told that we are not to resist evil but to turn the other cheek. The world assumes that evil must be resisted by every means

available. We are told to love our enemies and bless those who curse us. The world assumes that friends are to be loved and enemies hated... H.G. Wells was evidently right: Either there was something mad about this man, or our hearts are still too small for his message.¹³

The historic peace churches invite the rest of us to open our hearts more fully to Jesus’ hard, earthquake-like sayings on violence and non-violence.

Costa Rican theologian Elsa Tamez, who comes from a liberation and feminist tradition, addressed a 2002 meeting of the US Conference of the World Council of Churches on the topic of churches seeking reconciliation and peace. Her bible study was a wonderful illustration of creative and interesting work at the intersection of ecclesiology and ethnics, an attempt to bring the historic ecumenical streams of Faith and Order and Life and Work in closer

contact, pushing us toward a deeper grasp of what faith requires and what unity requires. Tamez led us on a journey of exploring God's mercy, justice, love, and grace. She issued a profound plea for non-violence and linked it to the Latin American call for "never again," the slogan that arose out of the experience of resisting the "dirty wars" of the 1970s and 1980s. The ecclesial implications came in her proposal to make mercy a mark of the church. Because of God's mercy, we are people of mercy, especially now at a time when there seems to be no mercy for so many across the world.¹⁴

Another illustration of the intimate connection between work for Christian unity and work for peace comes from home, the USA. In the months leading up to the March 2003 US invasion of Iraq, most of the 36 member churches of the NCCCUSA called on our government to continue to seek alternatives to war. They repeatedly expressed the judgment that US decision-makers had not yet exhausted all policy options short of declaring war. The NCCCUSA itself issued statements and drew together leaders of other faith traditions to give a united witness for peace both from within the mainline Christian community and across religions. The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops carefully compared the government's rationale for the Iraq war to the criteria enunciated by the just war doctrine. They concluded that this war did not meet these standards and called on world leaders to step back from the brink to "work for a peace that is just and enduring." In contrast, the Southern Baptist Convention and a number of televangelists concluded, on the basis of Hauerwas' "blank check" ethic, that the war was justified. Virtually all churches and ecumenical organizations called for prayers for our nation's leaders, world leaders, and all the people standing in harm's way. The World Council of Churches made statements similar to those of the NCCCUSA, US mainline Protestant and Orthodox churches as well as the US Conference of Catholic Bishops. Pope John Paul II spoke on behalf of the Roman Catholic

Church worldwide calling our government and others to draw back from war.

Despite the stance taken by the Southern Baptists and some televangelists, rarely have Christian churches the world over been so united in their call for the pursuit of a more peaceful and just alternative to a particular war. In response, Christians from the Middle East who live daily in the midst of violent expressions of inter-religious tensions, have repeatedly thanked US churches leaders for so boldly and courageously demonstrating to Muslims and Jews across the globe that Christians long deeply and work hard for peace.

On the basis of such deep gratitude for the remarkable clarity of this particular witness, the WCC Executive Committee has designated the United States as the geographic focus of the DOV in 2004. Each year of the decade, we choose a part of the world on which to focus our attention. In 2004, we want to shine a powerful spotlight on the work being done by US churches in pursuit of justice and peace in hopes of sharing these models with others across the globe. We also want to encourage the strengthening of this witness.

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I have many stories from across the world demonstrating that Christ's prayer that "they may all be one" lies at the heart of our work for peace and justice. I will end with one from Sri Lanka. In October 2000 at a theological consultation on issues related to the DOV we heard stories of pervasive violence against women in the midst of Sri Lanka's civil war and economic hardships. One consultation participant told of her own struggles about how to think about the men who had raped her. Some of her deepest meditations, she said, had been on finding the light of Christ in these men's faces, a theological practice the Quakers offer to the Christian family. After some years, she said that this no longer represented her toughest struggle. Although she continued to work on loving these particular enemies, recently her problem had been in trying to imagine what her reactions would be if her daughter

got raped. In a society where most girls encounter rape or other sexual violence, she believed it almost inevitable that her daughter might have such an experience such, too.

What more horrific “other” can there be than someone who would harm or kill your child? Am I required, she asked, to try to find the light of Christ in the face of my daughter’s attacker? “No!” was the mood of those gathered. Participants around the table clearly were of the mind that she should “Get him!” No mercy, not in this case. But the woman replied differently. Yes, she said, of course I am required to try to find the light of Christ in all my adversaries, even those who would attack my daughter. I must. I refuse, she said, to allow violence to control who I am or to take power over my life. Lock him up, or otherwise ensure he never attacks anyone else, but do not demonize him. I am a Christian, she said. We are people of the largest possible form of love, the love of Jesus Christ. Never again should we allow violence to control us.

One of the most practical ways to strengthen our churches’ commitment to reconciliation and peace is

through deepening our own discipline of meditation and prayer as individuals and as faith communities. Our ability to face the horrific challenge of violence perpetrated in the name of religion or any other name depends on us as Christians coming closer to Christ. Spiritual disciplines available across all our confessional traditions provide essential paths for drawing us closer to Christ.

An old friend in the ecumenical movement reminded me recently of a saying that ecumenists like to use. It states: When we come closer to Christ, we come closer to each other. A corollary might be a saying that comes out of the Russian Orthodox tradition: We each can get to hell all by ourselves, but we can only get to heaven in community with each other.

We Christians need each other more than ever for the integrity of our witness to the love and grace of Christ and for our work in a world that desperately needs the healing and wholeness Christ offers. Thank you for your long-standing commitment to this quest and for your regular public witness that hope really does overcome despair, that love really does overcome hate, and that life really does overcome death.

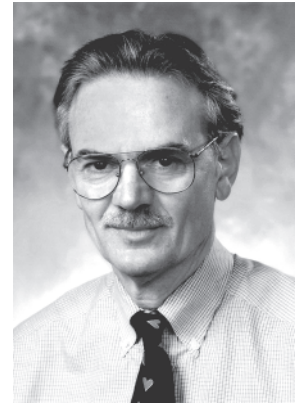
Notes

- 1 Quoted in Phil Cousineau, editor, *The Way Things Are Conversations with Huston Smith on the Spiritual Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).
- 2 R. Scott Appleby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence, and Reconciliation* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2000).
- 3 Charles Kimball, *When Religion Becomes Evil* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2002), p. 1.
- 4 Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), pp. 10 and 248.
- 5 Houston Smith, *The World’s Religions* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1991), p. 257.
- 6 Charles Kimball, *When Religion Becomes Evil* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2002), p. 27.
- 7 World Health Organization, *World Report on Violence and Health* (Geneva, 2002), www.who.org.
- 8 Ruth Sivard, *World Military and Social Expenditures 16th Edition* (Washington, DC: World Priorities, 1996).
- 9 Thanks to Peter Sederberg for this point.
- 10 Appleby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred*.
- 11 Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*, p.
- 12 Quoted in United Methodist Council of Bishops, *In Defense of Creation: The Nuclear Crisis and a Just Peace* (Nashville: Graded Press, 1986), p. 32.
- 13 Smith, *The World Religions*, p. 326.
- 14 See the United States Conference of the World Council of Churches for the text from the 2002 Annual Meeting.

Surely Division Has Its Fruit Why Unity and Peace are Inseparable

Michael Kinnamon

*TWENTY-FIRST PETER AINSLIE LECTURE ON CHRISTIAN UNITY
CHRISTIAN TEMPLE, BALTIMORE, MARYLAND, NOVEMBER 2, 2003*



Dr. Michael Kinnamon is the Allen and Dottie Miller Professor of Mission and Peace at Eden Theological Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri.

I want to begin by giving thanks for the ministry God has done through the Christian Temple over the past one hundred years. I am pleased to be here and deeply honored to be associated with the name of Peter Ainslie.

One hundred years, however, has different meanings to different people. A little over a decade ago, my daughter Anna and I were driving somewhere, listening to NPR, when a story came on about the great pianist Mieczyslaw Horszowski, who had just turned one hundred. Horszowski, you may remember, was still performing at that age. "Listen to this," I said to Anna. "This man who's playing the piano is a hundred years old." "Wow," she said, "he's middle aged." "No," I told her. "I'm middled aged. He's old." "No," she said, "I mean he's from the Middle Ages."

So I am pleased to be here with this medieval congregation.

* * *

This past summer, my faculty colleague, Damayanthi Niles, and I took a group of Eden Seminary students to India for three weeks of cross-cultural education. Once the students had returned to the United States, Damayanthi and I went on to Sri Lanka, the country of her birth. As you probably know, this little island off the tip of India has been torn apart by twenty years of civil war, pitting the Sinhalese majority (mostly Buddhists) against the Tamil minority (mostly Hindus). Some 70,000 persons (mostly civilians)

have died in those two decades of almost constant fighting.

Peace talks started about a year ago, and, though they are currently suspended, a cease fire is holding. This meant the Damayanthi and I were able to fly to Jaffna, center of the Tamil community on the island's northern coast. The town itself is pretty well bombed out; the old Dutch fort is gone, as are the large "downtown" churches. In the middle of Jaffna, there used to stand a statue of a famous Tamil leader. All that is left are the legs.

Damayanthi's grandfather, D.T. Niles, was one of the architects of the ecumenical movement, the most renown of all Asian church leaders of his generation. So we got royal treatment, including a car and driver who took us to visit congregations outside Jaffna where fighting had been particularly heavy during government offensives in 1995 and 2000. In one small village, 300 persons had died, including several Christians, and the church building had been destroyed. In another, the pastor and his family had survived by hiding in a tiny closet next to the stone fireplace, while most of their parsonage was blown away. Everywhere there were Sinhalese soldiers in helmets and flack jackets and signs warning of mines—which makes agricultural recovery very difficult.

The Christian community in Sri Lanka is, by Asian standards, quite large: perhaps six per cent of the population. And Christians are the only religious group that includes both Tamils and Sinhalese. There is a common Protestant seminary for both ethnic groups; individual churches include both in their decision-making bodies and assemblies. Which

means that the Christian community should be a significant, forceful witness for peace—except that this six percent is divided into Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Methodists, the Church of South India, Baptists (of various varieties), Presbyterians, Dutch Reformed, and a host of Evangelical and Pentecostal groups (imported, usually, from the United States).

D.T. Niles had helped start a church union effort in the 1940s, and plans were set for the inauguration of a united church in the early 1970s—until a handful of dissidents took the churches to court, claiming that their property would be taken away. (Any of this sound familiar?) In 1981, I organized an international conference of united churches in Sri Lanka with the hope that this would give new momentum to the union effort. But, of course, the civil war blew that away as well.

I will never forget the conversation I had with one Sri Lankan church leader during our 1981 conference. “Are you able,” I asked him, “to encourage government officials to work for reconciliation between Tamils and Sinhalese?” “We try,” he said. “But, they usually just laugh. They want to know how we Christians think we can contribute to national reconciliation when we can’t even overcome the church divisions inherited from the colonizers.”

Peter Ainslie would have understood this Sri Lankan pastor perfectly! You may know that Ainslie was one of the few church leaders, Disciples or otherwise, to oppose the First World War, a stance that did not enhance his popularity! But what I am most interested in this afternoon is the connection Ainslie drew between working for peace and promoting Christian unity. Listen to this passage from his wonderfully-titled book, *If Not a United Church—What?*

In the years to come the charge will be laid against the church of this day that because of its divisions, and therefore its unspiritual attitudes, the whole world is under the domination of social and economic wrongs, culminating in the disastrous war of 1914 At the crisis of 1914 organized Christianity stood helpless in every nation on the globe and was powerless to preserve the

peace of the world. *Surely division has its fruit.* Whatever may be the immediate causes, the remote cause of [World War I] must be laid at the door of the church.

* * *

Ainslie was not alone in this conviction. The Life and Work movement, one of the streams of activity that formed the World Council of Churches, was started amid the debris of this War to End All Wars. These four years of carnage were, in effect, a Christian civil war: Protestant Britain, Roman Catholic France, and Orthodox Russia aligned against Protestant Germany, Roman Catholic Austria-Hungary and Orthodox Bulgaria—with no platform for bringing the churches together for dialogue and possible common witness. It was this lacuna that the Lutheran Bishop, Nathan Söderblom, and others sought to fill with the emerging ecumenical movement.

The World Council itself was decisively shaped by World War II. The 1937 Oxford Conference on Church and Society, a meeting that called for the establishment of the WCC, also made this seminal declaration: “If war breaks out,

then pre-eminently the church must manifestly be the church, still united as the one body of Christ though the nations wherein it is planted fight each other The fellowship of prayer must at all cost remain unbroken.” Willem Visser’t Hooft, the Council’s first general secretary, called these sentences “the charter of the ecumenical movement” and incorporated them into a letter sent to all members of the “World Council in Process of Formation” once war actually began. The letter also lamented how miserably the church, because of its divisions, had failed to be the church in the First World War, and urged Christian leaders to prepare for the future by “seeking to ascertain from fellow Christians in the opposing camp what terms of peace might create a lasting peace.”

Please understand. Visser’t Hooft, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Reinhold Niebuhr and other ecumenical leaders of the day strongly denounced Nazism and

In 1981, I organized an international conference of united churches in Sri Lanka with the hope that this would give new momentum to the union effort. But, of course, the civil war blew that away as well.

called for the churches to support the struggle against it. But they also insisted that, even in such moments, our understanding of church must be shaped more by theology than by politics. Even in such moments, we must recognize that “they” are, in some fundamental way, part of “us”—and that the world has come to such a state because Christians have failed to incarnate Christ’s message of peace.

The ecumenical movement was further defined by the Cold War, by the fact that, even at the height of nuclear tension, the Iron Curtain did not prevent regular contact between churches. Ecumenical leaders repeatedly expressed a profound sense of relatedness in the face of political and military conflict. “I find,” said the great Norwegian Bishop, Eivind Berggrav, to a meeting of the WCC central committee in the 1950s, “that the New Testament demands of me that I shall be willing to accept as a full brother in Christ a man who seems to me quite dangerous in his political or economic views.” Twenty years later, General Tahi Simatupang, a key figure in Indonesia’s armed struggle for independence from the Netherlands, told the Central Committee that “Nothing on earth can unite me with the Dutch. But in Jesus Christ we are one.”

There are many other case studies we could give of this connection between the search for Christian unity and the search for peace. For example, the Russian Orthodox Church joined the WCC at the Council’s assembly in 1961, the very eve of the Cuban Missile Crisis. This, said the assembly’s delegates, is “a dramatic confirmation of our faith that God is holding his family together in spite of sin and complexity, and is a sign of hope for the world.” (Some of you may have participated in the church-to-church visits to what was then the Soviet Union, organized by the national council in this country.) At the WCC’s Canberra Assembly, which met in February of 1991, I found myself seated two chairs away from the Catholic Assyrian bishop of Baghdad; and together we watched as leaders of the China Christian Council and the Presbyterian Church in Taiwan publicly embraced.

We should not be surprised, then, that ecumenical leaders have repeatedly asserted that the ecumenical movement is, at its core, a peace movement. In my judgment, the best book ever written on ecumenism

is a slender volume by the German pastor, Ernst Lange, translated under the title *And Yet It Moves*. Lange begins his final chapter with these words: “The ecumenical movement is a movement for peace. Far wider than [the WCC’s Geneva offices], this movement is in fact the way in which the Christian churches really serve the cause of peace.”

Part of the point is sociological: Divisions in the body of Christ often exacerbate political conflicts and hinder effective peacemaking—which must be undertaken ecumenically. The Disciples response to war makes as little sense as the Presbyterian response to depletion of the ozone layer; such issues are simply too large to be tackled in denominational isolation.

The real point, however, is more theological. God’s gift of reconciliation is for the *world*; but the *church*, in the words of the apostle Paul, is entrusted with this message of reconciliation—and it delivers the message not just by what it says or even by what it does, but by what it *is*. The church, ecumenical conferences have repeatedly affirmed, is to be a sign, a demonstration project, of God’s intent for all creation—an intent which we often sum up with the Hebrew word *shalom*. The church isn’t just the bearer of the message of reconciliation, it is the message embodied. Or at least that’s what we are called to be in scripture. It is an obvious repudiation of the gospel when Catholics fight Protestants in Northern Ireland or when Christians butcher Christians in Rwanda; but the gospel is also denied when Christians in Sri Lanka live visibly unreconciled or when Christians in this country ignore the fact that we are related by blood to those who follow Christ in Cuba or Iraq.

I don’t want to be misunderstood: the message of the gospel is peace for *all* God’s children. It is no more acceptable in scriptural perspective to kill Muslims or atheists than other Christians. But, as Peter Ainslie knew full well, the way Christians live together could be, should be, our most powerful means of expressing this word of universal reconciliation.

* * *

I need, at this point, to acknowledge the obvious: Christians don’t all agree on whether war is ever acceptable or whether to support a particular policy of their government (e.g., the “war on terrorism”). The ecumenical movement itself has reminded us

over and over again that the church includes liberals and conservatives, hawks and doves.

Ecumenism, however, is not simply about agreeing to disagree; it is about seeking God's will together. And over the past sixty years, churches involved in ecumenical dialogue have said a number of things together about war and peace. I am going to name what I regard as the two most basic ecumenical agreements on this subject—and I do so with the conviction that, were Peter Ainslie here today, he would say “amen” to both.

1. In the words of the WCC's First Assembly (1948), “War is contrary to the will of God.” Yes, there may be times when war is a necessary evil, but it is still “inherently evil”—which means that Christians should never identify violence against others with the will of God or countenance such rhetoric when used by their governments. To put it another way, “crusade” is no longer seen as a legitimate Christian position. God's purpose is *shalom*. We do not go to war in the name of God.

In our era, of course, God has been blasphemously invoked to justify violence in such places as the Middle East, Northern Ireland, India, Sri Lanka, Algeria, Afghanistan, Iraq and the United States. Which makes it all the more important for us to bear concerted witness to the deeper truth that war is contrary to the will of God.

Hand in hand with this tendency to see God on our side of violent conflict is the tendency to demonize the other—which, in effect, denies our essential relatedness as persons created in the image of God. The Lutheran theologian, Joseph Sittler, makes this point beautifully: “To postulate a dichotomy that sees evil as primarily the character of the other,” writes Sittler, “is the sly and fateful way our self-deception operates. Evil is never more quietly powerful than in the assumption that it resides elsewhere.”

Of course, Dr. Sittler's words cut both ways. It is easy to point a finger at the President for the way he divides the world into opposing camps, urging us to recognize satanic enemies that can only be destroyed as part of a divinely-ordained struggle between good

and evil. But pointing at him alone repeats the problem. Many of us want peace and decry the current war in Iraq; but we also want things that make for conflict, including a standard of living that contributes to the poverty of billions of global neighbors and access to oil no matter where it's located. No, the world must not be divided into us and them because, as scripture repeatedly teaches, what we behold in the other is also in ourselves.

That, I think, is what Ainslie had in mind, in the quotation I read earlier, by linking the church's divisions with “unspiritual attitudes.” We divide because we forget or ignore our essential relatedness as children of God. I'm reminded of a quotation by Jonathan Swift: We have “just enough religion to make us hate one another but not enough to make us love one another”—not enough to teach us that *every* neighbor, as a bearer of God's image, is of infinite value. “Enough religion” has led the ecumenical churches to affirm that war is always contrary to the will of God.

2. Along with this, the ecumenical movement has also stressed that peace is fundamentally inseparable from justice. The World Council's

Fifth Assembly (1975) spoke of how peace is foundational to justice since militarization “distorts social and economic priorities,” taking the greatest toll on those who are poor. Conversely, the Sixth Assembly (1983) insisted that “without justice for all everywhere, there shall never be peace anywhere.”

What is emerging through these ecumenical conversations is a new paradigm beyond the old alternatives of just war and pacifism—a paradigm that our ecumenical partner, the United Church of Christ, calls “just peacemaking.” It is not enough, said Martin Luther King, Jr., to hate war; we must also “love peace and sacrifice for it.” It is not enough to react to the threat of war; we must be proactive in our efforts to change those conditions that contribute to conflict.

The UCC theologian, Susan Thistlethwaite, in a recent essay, offers a concrete example of what this might mean for public policy. Afghanistan, she points out, needed a Marshall Plan after the period

We should not be surprised, then, that ecumenical leaders have repeatedly asserted that the ecumenical movement is, at its core, a peace movement.

of Soviet occupation. But the U.S. and other wealthy countries did not act because Afghanistan didn't then seem important to our "national interest." "We let poverty and oppression rule," she writes, "and now we are reaping the results." As I tell students, working for peace in Iraq in 2003, while important, was too late. Our most effective peacemaking will come if we envision what will make for peace in 2010—and work for it now. Seen in this light, the decision to use armed force, while perhaps a necessary last resort, *always* represents the failure of governments and churches to work for justice.

To put it another way, the church shouldn't just react to evils in the world; it should be proactive in its peacemaking—which includes work for Christian unity. Nietzsche once said that he might believe in their Redeemer if only Christ's followers looked more redeemed! And the same is true for our witness to the Prince of Peace. We can proclaim the unity of the church and the human family until we are blue in the face, but until we stop treating each other with neglect and indifference, until we stop refusing to break bread together at one table, until our churches stop reinforcing the class and racial lines of wider society, until we stop ignoring our connection to Christians in other parts of the world, the credibility of our message will continue to be undercut by the non-credibility of the messengers.

* * *

I hope that what I have said thus far has established that peacemaking and Christian unity went hand in hand for Peter Ainslie and many leaders of the modern ecumenical movement, and should go hand in hand for us. Unfortunately, as you know well, we often separate what ought to be joined together. In the history of the church, those who have emphasized peacemaking have often feared that unity would weaken the radical edge of their proclamation, while those who have emphasized unity have often feared that peacemaking would prove divisive. That's why the historic peace churches—Mennonites, Brethren, Quakers—have generally been sectarian, while

churches more inclined toward cooperation have generally left matters of war and peace to the individual conscience. As a result, to quote the Presbyterian theologian, Lewis Mudge, ". . . there seems little connection [in the minds of mainline church members] between the moral convictions to which they bear witness and the nature of the ecclesial communities in which these convictions are nurtured." Little connection, in other words, between our concern for peace and our concern for sharing the Lord's Supper or recognizing different forms of baptism.

There are numerous examples of this disconnect. Last January 16, Bob Edgar, general secretary of the National Council of Churches, was on NPR's Diane Rheem show talking about the anti-war protests that were to take place two days later in Washington and San Francisco. "It is appropriate," said Edgar, "that such a call for peace occur on the weekend when we commemorate the ministry of Martin Luther King." He never, however, connected the call for peace to the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity which also began (as it has since the time of Peter Ainslie) on January 18, 1985, the year that the UCC declared itself a "just peace church," was also the year that the Disciples and the UCC declared our Ecumenical Partnership. But there was no indication, at either the UCC General Synod or the Disciples General Assembly, that these two acts might be part of a whole vision of church. At the Kansas City General Assembly two years ago, both the Disciples and the UCC affirmed participation in Churches Uniting in Christ, a covenantal relationship involving nine Protestant communions. But there was no mention of it whatsoever at the Disciples Peace Fellowship Breakfast, just as there is usually (until this year!) little or no mention of resolutions dealing with peace at the dinners of the Council on Christian Unity.

Let me say it as clearly as possible: Disciples shouldn't *have* a peace fellowship; we should *be* a peace fellowship. It is part and parcel of our claim to be an ecumenical people. At the General Assembly just ended, however, we managed to say virtually nothing

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in the assembly business about either unity or peace—as if the church weren't still desperately divided and the world desperately fragmented. Yes, we had a prayer vigil for peace, but it was treated as an aftersession, as an optional activity for those who are into that sort of thing. And, of course, there was no mention at the vigil itself of what Barton Stone called our “polar star”—Christian unity.

* * *

Some years ago, T.J. Liggett, one of the truly outstanding Disciples of his generation, told me that he had two passions about which he would speak whenever invited: the unity of the church and the peace of the human community. This puts T.J. in good company. You know of Alexander Campbell's statements on Christian unity, but you may not know that he was also a consistent pacifist. “The precepts of Christianity,” argued Campbell, “positively inhibit war The beatitudes of Christ are not pronounced on patriots, heroes and conquerors, but on ‘peacemakers’ on whom is conferred the highest rank and title in the universe: ‘Blessed are the

peacemakers, for they shall be called the [children of God].” In the first issue of *The Christian Baptist*, he wrote scathingly of those who pray for military victory through which are created the orphans and widows on which they can exercise their Christian charity.

Between Campbell and Liggett stands Peter Ainslie, the most committed ecumenist of his day, for whom peace, as we have seen, was an equally-burning concern. Ainslie believed, as do I, that in the church we have been bound to people we wouldn't, humanly-speaking, choose to be with—perhaps can't even stand! And this community of the unlike—Jew and Gentile, Protestant and Catholic, American and Iraqi, black and white—is itself a radical act of peacemaking, a sign of God's power, in the words of the psalmist, “to break the bow, shatter the spear, and burn the shields with fire.”

Surely division has its fruit, but so does unity. Living ecumenically witnesses to the truth that, as followers of Christ, we belong together. And when we demonstrate that belonging, we contribute to God's intended *shalom*. May it be so.

The Peter Ainslie Lecture on Christian Unity is delivered annually by an internationally recognized ecumenical scholar, and is intended to witness to the vision of Christian unity. Dr. Peter Ainslie III (1867-1934), a distinguished ecumenist, was the minister of Christian Temple, the Disciples congregation in Baltimore, Maryland, and the first president of the Council on Christian Unity. This lecture, inaugurated in 1982, is endowed by the Peter Ainslie Fund and sponsored by the Council on Christian Unity of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).