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## UNITY AND MISSION

# An evangelical alternative?

The integration of the IMC and the WCC did not meet with general agreement. A group of missionaries and mission supporters from the ranks of the IMC (called *evangelicals*) did not support the decision to integrate the two bodies.<sup>1</sup> In the years immediately following this event, the evangelicals started articulating more and more clearly their disagreement with developments in the thinking about unity and mission in ecumenical circles. A platform was provided for these views by the organisation of a series of congresses, starting with the Wheaton Congress in 1966. They succeeded in drawing together large numbers of missionaries and theologians from all over the world, presenting a point of view which cannot simply be ignored. This chapter will therefore be an attempt to provide an overview of the different emphases in expressing the interrelationship between unity and mission in evangelical circles.

### 1. The Wheaton Congress

The Wheaton Congress was predominantly North American in character.

It was organized by two American associations,<sup>2</sup> but as they represented a large number of missionaries across the world, Wheaton was bound to have world-wide influence. Wheaton is also important because it was the first exclusively evangelical missions conference after the integration of the IMC and the WCC, and therefore the first opportunity where evangelicals could articulate *their* position. Wheaton eventually became the first of a series of such conferences, and, for all these reasons, is thus of fundamental importance. A declaration was issued at the end of the conference, expressing the consensus reached by the delegates. In order to elucidate certain statements in the declaration, it is necessary also to take into account some of the papers read at Wheaton.<sup>3</sup>

### *1.1 Unity and mission according to Wheaton*

In the Wheaton Declaration, a direct and fundamental link between unity and mission was established on the basis of John 17. This unity would not necessarily be expressed in organizational form, as organizational unity in fact very seldom led to greater missionary enthusiasm. "Biblical oneness" therefore was to be found rather in the agreement of true Christians on the basic truths of the Gospel, even though these Christians might (continue to) belong to different organizations. The declaration conceded that evangelicals often neglected this "biblical oneness" because of carnal differences and personal grievances.

In order to manifest this unity more clearly, therefore, certain "declarations" were issued: "That we will endeavour to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace so that the world may believe. That we will encourage and assist in the organization of evangelical fellowships among churches and missionary societies at national, regional and international levels. That we will encourage evangelical mission mergers when such will eliminate duplication of administration, produce more efficient stewardship of personnel and resources, and strengthen their ministries. That we caution evangelicals to avoid establishing new churches or organizations where existing groups of like precious faith satisfactorily fill the rôle."<sup>4</sup>

The definition of religious liberty in the Wheaton Declaration also revealed the thinking of the congress on unity and mission: "(Religious freedom) means freedom to propagate and to change one's faith or church affiliation, as well as the freedom to worship God.... We shall obey God rather than men in resisting the monopolistic tendencies both within and without Christendom that seek to stifle evangelical witness to

Jesus Christ..... we shall not use unbiblical, unethical methods of persuading people to change their religious allegiance. However, when we seek conversion of unregenerate men, even though they may be attached to some church or other religion, we are fulfilling our biblical mandate."<sup>5</sup> The Declaration ended with a "covenant" in which delegates undertook to seek "the mobilization of the church, its people, its prayers, and resources, for the evangelization of the world in this generation."<sup>6</sup> This "covenant" seemed to have been a conscious revival of the Edinburgh slogan and the fervent missionary (evangelistic) spirit which characterized the founding of the IMC.

## *1.2 An evaluation of the Wheaton Congress*

1.2.1 In the concept of unity expounded at Wheaton, the emphasis was placed so overwhelmingly on spiritual unity that there was no real need for any form of visible, organizational unity.<sup>7</sup> This was so because unity was seen as existing primarily (almost exclusively) in the link between Christ and the "true regenerate" individual believer. "Biblical oneness" therefore existed in the invisible unity created among certain individuals by way of their individual connectedness with Christ. This inevitably led to a devaluation of the Church as a visible institution, as became apparent in the definition of religious liberty. Where someone was not a "true regenerate" believer according to evangelical norms, church affiliation was of no importance and so the conversion of such "unregenerate men" could be regarded as a fulfilment of the missionary mandate. This concept of unity can in fact be compared to the pre-Vatican II point of view of the Roman Catholic Church, viz. that the way to restore unity was by returning to Rome. One can say that according to the Wheaton concept, the only way to unity was by "returning" to the evangelical fold on terms laid down by evangelicals.

1.2.2 Because unity was seen as invisible and completely spiritual, and could therefore not be established in any visible, organizational form, there was a tendency to divorce the missionary mandate from the call to unity. As nothing much could really be done in the realm of unity, the missionary mandate was elevated to the be-all and end-all of Christian responsibility.<sup>8</sup> Such a separation is, however, incorrect, as unity must lead to mission must lead to unity must lead to mission.<sup>9</sup> Christians therefore are called equally to unity *and* mission; one should not be emphasized at the expense of the other.

1.2.3 The concept of unity as expressed at Wheaton furthermore

revealed marked pragmatic overtones. This was evident e.g. in the "declarations" quoted above, where unity was specifically advocated mainly in order to avoid wasteful use of people and resources. It was even more evident in a paper read by Mortenson. He called for unity "designed for world evangelism, and (which) should be manifested by the effectiveness of its outreach." He tested previous union schemes according to statistics (new missionaries sent out and more funds contributed), and where there was generally not a significant increase in these, he concluded that the drive for unity was worthless and a waste of time.<sup>10</sup> Such an evaluation conforms to what has been pointed out in the previous paragraph: because only the missionary mandate is really essential and binding, unity can be judged on completely pragmatic grounds according to the missionary results it accomplishes. The unity of the Church is thus relegated to a secondary position on completely pragmatic grounds.

1.2.4 Wheaton revealed a strongly polemical attitude towards other Christian groups in its statement of the missionary mandate. This was evident, for example, in the declaration on religious liberty, in such a way that reference could be made to a "legitimate Biblical proselytism."<sup>11</sup> In his overview of the congress, Lindsell could therefore point out the strong suspicion towards the WCC, the Orthodox churches and the Roman Catholic Church as one of the noteworthy features of the congress.<sup>12</sup> It comes as no surprise that Smith was able to express admiration for many aspects of the congress, but voiced his fear exactly on this aspect: the divisive results the congress could have because of its "preoccupation with opposition". This would have a detrimental effect especially on young churches in the Third World.

Smith pointed out that this polemical attitude had to be seen in the context of a "profound difference between the initiative which comes from the United Kingdom and that from the United States for the establishment of such (evangelical) fellowship. In the former case there is no desire to make such a fellowship exclusive..... In sharp contrast is the statement of the recently established Evangelical Fellowship of Africa and Madagascar, which restricts participation to bodies that have no part in the activities of the World Council of Churches or any related agencies. A number of well-informed persons at the Congress said that the same intention will underlie the establishment of other evangelical fellowships sponsored by the EFMA and IFMA. One can only regret the divisions thus produced by forcing Christian bodies to make such a choice, especially in countries where Christians compose small minority groups confronting massive and entrenched paganism."<sup>13</sup> This can right-

fully be considered one of the most unfortunate influences of Wheaton on subsequent evangelical thinking on unity and mission, especially in the Third World.

1.2.5 There was present at Wheaton an element of contrition which does not always characterize the evangelical point of view. This was evident for example in the declaration where it was stated that even amongst themselves, evangelicals had not succeeded in realizing the necessary unity because of carnal differences and personal grievances. In his commentary on the congress, Fenton (himself an evangelical), stated, "Doubtless our attempts to formulate and to express our opinions were often marked by inconsistency. We sometimes stressed the fact that organization was not essential to unity (an attempt to express one of our concerns about the World Council); a little later, we would be urging one another to organize evangelical fellowships and to consider the merger of some of our missions (an attempt to present a more united front, and a more efficient one, before the world – and before the ecumenical movement)".<sup>14</sup> This element of contrition is an essential prerequisite for *any* group of Christians if that unity for which Christ prayed, and which will convince the world, is ever to be realized in the Church.

1.2.6 The history of missions provides ample evidence of the often haphazard application of missionary resources, resulting in duplication and over-denominationalization in many parts of the world. The concept of unity articulated at Wheaton, with its markedly pragmatic overtones, can be considered to have revealed an awareness of this state of affairs and to have provided a first tentative step towards overcoming it.

### 1.3 Conclusion

In this way Wheaton laid the foundation for the evangelical alternative to the ecumenical concepts of unity and mission. The way in which the basic evangelical concepts (on unity and mission) would develop or change in subsequent discussions, will now be traced. The first opportunity for such discussions on a world-wide scale, was provided by the World Congress on Evangelism in Berlin later in 1966.

## 2. The Berlin Congress

The World Congress on Evangelism in Berlin 1966, on the theme: *One race, one gospel, one task*, was organized mainly on the initiative of

Billy Graham. As it was attended by more than 1 000 delegates from 100 nations, with strong representation and input from the Third World, it was, however, more representative of world-wide evangelicalism than the Wheaton Congress.<sup>15</sup> Since Berlin issued no declaration, but only a brief closing statement, an assessment of its thinking on unity and mission will have to be based more on papers read at the congress and on the comments of delegates and observers.

## 2.1 *The concept of unity*

2.1.1 As at Wheaton, the concept of unity articulated at Berlin emphasized most strongly the spiritual unity of individual believers. So, for example, Billy Graham stated in his closing message to the congress, "we have said to the world that we are a *spiritually united* fellowship regardless of race, culture, language, denominational or ecclesiastical affiliation... This is the *spiritual unity* of the Church."<sup>16</sup> Any form of organizational unity was not only regarded with suspicion, but was actually rejected explicitly. In the letter of invitation to the congress Graham wrote, "There is no thought of organizing a new movement; in fact we are very definite that no organization will come out of such a conference. It will be for prayer, fellowship and study of evangelistic strategy in the face of problems of evangelism round the world."<sup>17</sup> The Church as institution, therefore, was still devalued and unity still seen in (almost) exclusively spiritual terms. For this reason, Künneth in his paper on "Hindrances to evangelism in the Church" could simply ignore the division among churches as in any way presenting a hindrance to evangelism.<sup>18</sup>

2.1.2 Individual believers were bound together in this spiritual unity by a very specific binding force. "Berlin 1966 defined, as well as demonstrated, evangelicalism. The interdenominational unity of historical revivalism expressed itself."<sup>19</sup> The binding force was therefore a specific perception of the need for evangelism, as it was expressed in "historical revivalism". This was also evident in Graham's paper, "Why the Berlin Congress?" He stated, "Do we want unity among true believers? Then evangelize! I believe that some of the greatest demonstrations of ecumenicity in the world today are these evangelistic crusades where people have been meeting by the thousands from various denominations with the purpose of evangelizing.... Having said that, however, our greatest need is *not* organizational unity. Our greatest need is for the Church to be baptized with the fire of the Holy Ghost and to go out proclaiming the Gospel everywhere."<sup>20</sup> According to this perception, revivalistic, crusade-type evangelism was to provide the binding force for spiritual

unity. The institutional Church was then of secondary importance, and consequently there was such a strong emphasis on the spiritual unity of like-minded individual believers.

## 2.2 *Influence on mission (evangelism)*

2.2.1 Because unity was regarded mainly as the spiritual unity of like-minded individual believers, evangelism was not to be the task of the whole Church, but was rather to be the responsibility of the "committed few" – the old pietistic concept of *ecclesiolae in ecclesia*. This is revealed clearly in Johnston's statement that at Berlin "the interdenominational unity of historical revivalism expressed itself..... Berlin represented a unity and a cohesiveness that drew not only the small separatist denominations together, but disclosed significant evangelical elements within traditional Protestant denominations and the Church of England."<sup>21</sup> These "evangelical elements" within the historical *Protestant* churches were to be the true bearers of mission. Where other Christians might be called upon to join the Church's mission to evangelize the world, it would be by virtue of belonging to these "evangelical elements" – *not* by virtue of belonging to the whole Church.

2.2.2 The suspicion with which any kind of organizational unity was regarded, led to a rejection of the whole organized ecumenical movement as it had developed in the twentieth century. "The World Congress on Evangelism of 1966 held in Berlin represents a continuity in evangelism that has its roots in the New Testament as well. The great evangelistic and missionary movement of the last century was concluded by missionary conferences held in London 1888 and in New York 1900. The Edinburgh 1910 World Missionary Conference was no longer evangelical: the infallibility of Scripture was sacrificed for the principle of organizational unity. World Evangelism would be accomplished, they thought, through an ecumenical movement."<sup>22</sup> It is clear that, according to this point of view, world evangelism obviously would not be achieved through any kind of organizational unity. For this reason the missionary endeavours of all twentieth century ecumenical organizations, but especially those of the WCC, had been in vain. The Berlin Congress has therefore to be regarded *inter alia* as an attempt to present an evangelical alternative in world mission/evangelism.

## 2.3 *Evaluation*

2.3.1 The basic theological link between unity and mission was not

thought through at Berlin. Whereas Wheaton at least stated this link, Berlin did not even make mention of it. Where there was reference to the interrelationship between unity and mission at Berlin, it remained on the practical level ("how to do it better"). In this regard, Berlin can probably be compared with Edinburgh 1910.

2.3.2 The concept of unity at Berlin was still the unity of like-minded individuals. The very necessary element of the diversity in the Church enriching the unity of the Church (Eph. 3:18-19), was not allowed to play any rôle at all.

2.3.3 The historical churches generally were regarded as obstacles to, rather than partners in, world mission/evangelism. The Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox churches in particular were in fact regarded rather as objects of mission/evangelism. They were criticized because in practising "ecclesiastical totalitarianism" they would not allow "evangelical witness" to their members.<sup>23</sup> This can be seen as a result of the general devaluation of the Church as institution in evangelical thinking on unity and mission. Yet the history of the Protestant missionary movement since the 18th century provides ample evidence of the serious difficulties that had to be overcome for Church and mission to find each other. It is therefore extremely doubtful whether the evangelical point of view as articulated at Berlin would really benefit the world mission of the Church in the long run.

After Berlin a series of smaller evangelical missionary conferences took place at Singapore (1968), Minneapolis (1969), Bogota (1969) and Amsterdam (1971). The next world-wide gathering of evangelicals, however, took place at the International Congress on World Evangelization at Lausanne in 1974.

### 3. Lausanne, 1974.

The International Congress on World Evangelization held in 1974 in Lausanne was by far the most significant meeting of evangelicals to have taken place in the period covered by this study. Nearly 3 000 delegates from more than 150 nations took part in it. As such, the Lausanne Covenant,<sup>24</sup> drawn up at the congress and signed by many delegates, can rightly be regarded as of fundamental importance for the evangelical point of view.

### 3.1 *Unity and mission according to the Lausanne Covenant*

The Covenant was a fairly comprehensive document, setting out the evangelical position on the mission of the Church in fifteen paragraphs. One paragraph (no. 7) dealt with unity and mission, stating: "We affirm that the church's visible unity in truth is God's purpose. Evangelism also summons us to unity, because our oneness strengthens our witness, just as our disunity undermines our gospel of reconciliation. We recognize, however, that organizational unity may take many forms and does not necessarily forward evangelism. Yet we who share the same biblical faith should be closely united in fellowship, work and witness. We confess that our testimony has sometimes been marred by sinful individualism and needless duplication. We pledge ourselves to seek a deeper unity in truth, worship, holiness and mission. We urge the development of regional and functional co-operation for the furtherance of the church's mission, for strategic planning, for mutual encouragement, and for the sharing of resources and experience. (John 17:21,23; Eph. 4:3,4; John 13:35; Phil. 1:27; John 17:11-23)".<sup>2 5</sup>

The most important aspects to be noted in the covenant on the concept of unity at Lausanne and its influence on mission, are the following:

3.1.1 There was greater and more explicit emphasis on the fundamental link between the unity of the *Church* (and not just individual believers) and its mission than in any previous statement of the evangelical point of view: "We affirm that the church's visible unity in truth is God's purpose. Evangelism also summons us to unity....."

3.1.2 As a result, Lausanne started getting to grips also with *organizational* unity – something which was ignored at Wheaton and Berlin. It is clear that there was no consensus or complete clarity on this subject yet ("organizational unity may take many forms....."); yet the need for unity to take some sort of organizational or institutional form was clearly realized.

3.1.3 An element of exclusivism was still present, though, as the people to be so united should share "the same biblical faith". The content of this "biblical faith" obviously was to be determined by evangelicals themselves. There was not a pressing need for fellowship, work and witness with people not holding this interpretation of "biblical faith".

3.1.4 In stating the interrelationship between unity and mission, pride of place was still given to mission/evangelism. This is the inevitable conclusion of the implication that those forms of organizational unity

were to be pursued which would "forward evangelism". It was for this reason also that "the development of regional *and functional* co-operation for the furtherance of the church's mission was urged."

3.1.5 In stating the evangelical concept of unity and mission, as in the rest of the covenant, there was a noticeable openness to self-criticism and a greater readiness to confess (even as "sinful") weaknesses in the evangelical position.

### 3.2 *General assessment of Lausanne*

3.2.1 Lausanne recognised the fact that the *whole* Church (not just a group of individual believers within the Church) as an *organized* institution is to stand in the centre of all efforts at mission/evangelism. In his commentary on Lausanne, Stott admitted that evangelicals often have a rather "low view" of the Church. For that reason he rejoiced in the fact that Lausanne realized, "There can be no evangelism without the Church."<sup>26</sup> This greater importance attached to the Church is to be welcomed.

3.2.2 A general weakness in evangelical ecclesiology was, however, still present at Lausanne: the tendency to view the Church exclusively in terms of evangelistic success. If unity does not "forward evangelism" according to the evangelical understanding of the word, it does not really have the right to exist.<sup>27</sup> This means that three of the four classical "marks" of the Church, viz. unity, holiness and catholicity, are for all practical purposes ignored (or totally "spiritualized"), while the fourth, viz. apostolicity, begins to function as the touchstone of the authenticity of the Church.

3.2.3 In general the point of view as articulated by the evangelicals at Lausanne left the impression of greater openness than that of Wheaton or Berlin. This was evident, for example, in the openness to self-criticism.<sup>28</sup> "The concept of the church renewed for mission is hardly novel in the ecumenical movement, but Lausanne saw evangelicals recognizing in healthy self-criticism the need for the spiritual and moral renewal of their own churches."<sup>29</sup> On the other hand, a certain sense of exclusivism could also still be detected, e.g. in B. Graham's statement before Lausanne, "This must be a gathering of those totally committed to the evangelical position as we understand it. This should not be a gathering of those committed to liberal or to controversial positions."<sup>30</sup> It was also implicit in the Covenant: "Yet we who share the same biblical faith

should be united,...."<sup>31</sup> As Lausanne affirmed that "the Church's visible unity in truth is God's purpose",<sup>32</sup> this raises the question whether possession of the full truth can ever be claimed by any *part* of the Church. Is the full truth not rather promised to the *whole* body of Christ, to be discovered and experienced in fellowship (Eph. 3:18-19)?

3.2.4 Despite the generally greater awareness of the basic theological link between the unity of the Church and its mission,<sup>33</sup> Lausanne still tended to express the interrelationship mainly in functional terms. That is why Johnston could state in his commentary on Lausanne, "Edinburgh 1910 sought it (world evangelization) by *organizational* unity while Lausanne 1974 sought a *functional* unity to accomplish regional evangelization and, ultimately, that of the world."<sup>34</sup> This tendency in evangelical thinking on unity and mission (also present in the pragmatic concept of the relationship between unity and mission at Wheaton) has to be questioned, as the interrelationship is one of *essence*, not of *function*.

### 3.3 Conclusion

It may be that Lausanne will prove to be the last congress where so large and representative a group of evangelicals could gather and reach such a degree of consensus. An influential evangelical such as P. Beyerhaus is quite outspoken in his criticism of the "irenic spirit" of Lausanne. He and a large group of followers (the "deutsche Bekenntnisgruppe" – "German Confessional Group") desired a much stronger condemnation of the WCC as heretical, in fact as the antichrist, in the spirit of the exceedingly polemical Berlin Declaration.<sup>35</sup> According to Beyerhaus, it is possible after Lausanne to distinguish six groups of evangelicals. The Lausanne Covenant reflected the spirit mainly of the "new evangelicals", who were (according to him) too optimistic in their assessment of the WCC. He termed their spirit one of "kontroverstheologische Selbstentwaffnung",<sup>36</sup> a spirit which would only be exploited by ecumenicals to prove significant areas of agreement between Lausanne and Geneva. This was completely unacceptable to certain groups of evangelicals, who were also disappointed because Lausanne did not form an evangelical counterpart to the WCC.<sup>37</sup> It seems, therefore, that there exists at least a possibility of a growing convergence between ecumenicals and a group of evangelicals, while another group of evangelicals may try to form a "new IMC" to express their growing polemical attitude towards the WCC in particular.

#### 4. General Assessment of the Evangelical Alternative

To conclude this chapter, a general assessment is attempted of evangelical thinking on unity and mission in the period covered by this study.

4.1 The evangelical movement continually reminded the Church in general and the organized ecumenical movement in particular of its evangelistic obligation. In so doing, it has succeeded in serving as a constant reminder of the origins out of which the twentieth century ecumenical movement grew. To make use of Gensichen's distinction in a somewhat adapted form: the evangelicals have served as a constant reminder that the professed missionary dimension of the ecumenical movement must indeed be expressed in concrete missionary intention.<sup>38</sup> On the other hand, evangelicals might themselves benefit by learning from Gensichen that although everything the Church does must have a missionary dimension, not everything necessarily has a missionary (evangelistic) intention as well. As has been pointed out above (e.g. p. 83), evangelical thinking on the interrelationship between unity and mission is definitely in danger of an over-emphasis on the apostolicity of the Church at the expense particularly of its unity and catholicity. Ideally, the evangelical position as articulated at Lausanne should serve as complementary to the position of the WCC, and vice versa. One would hope, therefore, that this serious polarization does not turn into a final schism (something which certain evangelicals actually seem to desire — cf. p. 84 above).

4.2 Evangelicals have generally tended towards a concept of unity in terms of like-mindedness, and a very specific kind of like-mindedness at that, viz. holding to the same "biblical faith", and sharing an enthusiasm for historical evangelical revivalism. Unity, according to the evangelical viewpoint, therefore, to a large degree coincides with uniformity, and is to find expression mainly in one specific dimension of mission (evangelism). There is a sense in which such a concept of unity is very attractive, giving a comforting sense of security and belonging in an increasingly problem-ridden, divided and alienated world. It is, however, a very parochial kind of unity. The unity of the whole (catholic) Church is much more a unity in diversity, a unity which actually needs to be enriched by diversity, and which can also be expressed in diverse ways in the mission of the catholic Church.<sup>39</sup> In the same way the real fullness of biblical faith can only be grasped and find expression in communion with all God's people.<sup>40</sup> Many evangelicals, though, reveal a distinct uneasiness at any signs of such diversity.<sup>41</sup> This seems to result from the one-sided over-emphasis on apostolicity at the expense of catholicity (pointed out in the previous paragraph).

4.3 There is a sense in which the strong emphasis on the *spiritual* unity of believers and their evangelistic responsibility, springs from a "theology of apocalyptic despair". This means that at least some (possibly many) evangelicals have abandoned hope for *this* world and have instead taken refuge in the imminent coming of the next. Working towards the visible unity of the Church in such a lost world is simply a waste of precious time and energy. The most important task is quite clear: that like-minded believers (i.e. those who share this "spiritual" unity) should do all in their power and concentrate every effort on "gathering the company of the Lamb."<sup>42</sup> It seems, therefore, that we are back at the beginnings of the Protestant missionary movement, when, in view of the imminent return of Christ, spiritually united believers should join in "winning souls for the Lamb" (mostly in missionary societies), a task so urgent that it simply transcended denominational barriers (without ever really having thought through either the concept of unity or that of mission).

4.4 The whole process of polarisation between evangelicals and ecumenicals on the unity and mission of the Church, as it has developed especially since the issuing of the "Frankfurt Declaration" in 1970,<sup>43</sup> has been detrimentally influenced by a tendency among some evangelical theologians to fight (like Don Quixote) against windmills of their own making in their crusade against the ecumenical movement. This was evident, for example, in Beyerhaus' attempt to ascribe the refusal to discuss the Frankfurt Declaration in the plenary at Bangkok to a sinister plot of the "Geneva Staff" in particular and to the unwillingness of ecumenicals in general still to "bow before the authority of God's Word".<sup>44</sup> When pressed for a representative comment from the German delegation on this so-called crisis, W. Gengenagel of the Basel Mission responded, "Not every crisis in church history is of a dogmatic nature. Behind dogmatic controversies there are often other conflicts hidden. That applies to a great extent to the so-called Frankfurt Declaration. It defends with a grim courage positions which the missionary leaders in Germany do not even attack. And it fires with all guns on positions, which (in the form in which they are stated), nobody defends. The noise of gunfire, however, silences the real questions."<sup>45</sup>

## 5. Conclusion

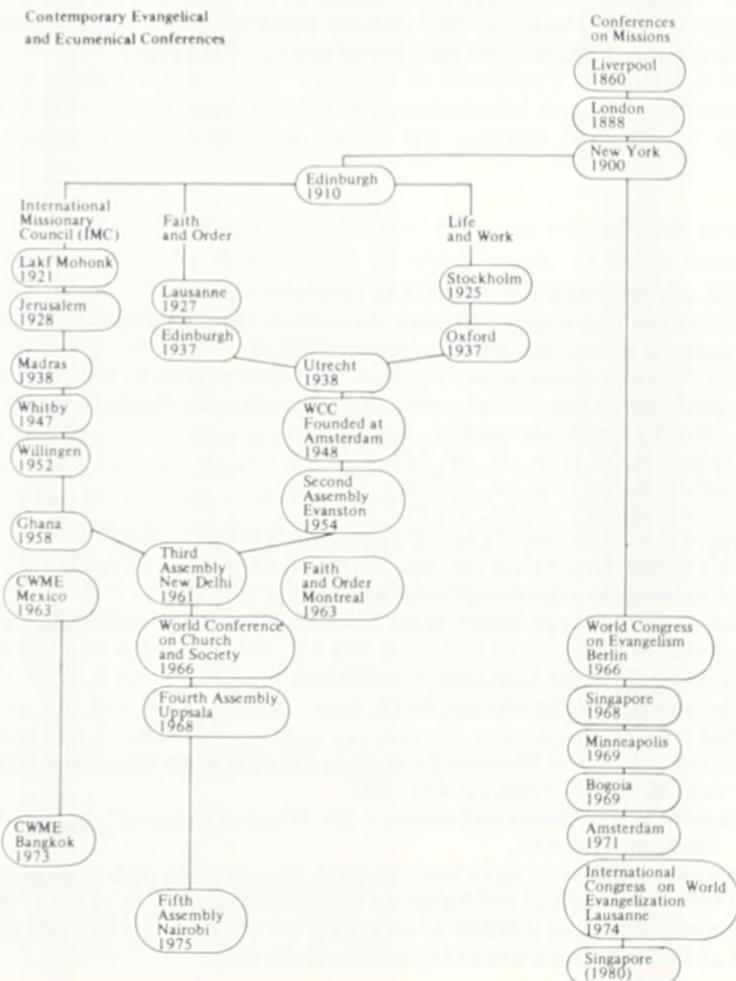
With Lausanne 1974 the Evangelicals firmly established themselves as a force to be reckoned with in ecumenical discussions on unity and mission. The stronger influence of European evangelicals<sup>46</sup> such as J. Stott,

the architect of the Lausanne Covenant, certainly seemed to make for a more conciliatory approach. The first opportunity to gauge the extent to which the other partners in the ecumenical discussions took note of the evangelical alternative, would be the WCC Assembly at Nairobi in 1975. Before turning to that occasion, however, it is necessary to take note of the point of view of an important segment of the World Church: the Orthodox churches. They had all been members of the WCC mostly since New Delhi 1961, and as such it might be argued that their voice was part of that of the WCC. As will become clear in the next chapter, though, Orthodox theology, particularly in its thinking on the unity of the Church and its mission, had quietly been making a unique contribution. This contribution is the subject of the next chapter.

### Notes

1. This was dealt with in more detail in the Introduction.
2. The Evangelical Foreign Missions Association (EFMA) and the Interdenominational Foreign Missions Association (IFMA).
3. The Wheaton Declaration, together with papers read at the congress, are published in the official report of the congress, viz. Lindsell, H. (ed.): *The Church's worldwide mission*.
4. Lindsell, H. (ed.): *op. cit.*, pp. 227–228.
5. Lindsell, H. (ed.): *op. cit.*, p. 226.
6. Lindsell, H. (ed.): *op. cit.*, p. 237.
7. This was actually one of Lindsell's conclusions in his overview.
8. Cf. Lindsell, H. (ed.): *op. cit.*, pp. 4–17; also Stirnimann, H. (ed.): *Ökumenische Erneuerung in der Mission*, pp. 18–20.
9. John 17: 20–21; cf. Marty, M.E.: *Church unity and church mission*, pp. 102–103.
10. Cf. Lindsell, H. (ed.): *op. cit.*, pp. 165–167.
11. Lindsell, H. (ed.): *op. cit.*, pp. 4–17.
12. *Ibid.*
13. Smith, E.L.: "The Wheaton Congress in the eyes of an ecumenical observer", in *IRM*, vol. 55, 1966, pp. 481–482.
14. Fenton, H.L.: "Debits and credits – the Wheaton Congress", in *IRM*, vol. 55, 1966, pp. 478–479.
15. An important factor to be borne in mind, though, is the difference in emphasis between American and European evangelicals referred to in 1.2.4. With the strong American initiative in organizing the congress, this different approach and attitude could still be expected to reveal itself.

16. Lindsell, H. & Mooneyham, S. (ed.): *One race, one gospel, one task*, Vol. I, p. 151. Italics mine.
17. Quoted in Johnston, A.P.: *The battle for world evangelism*. p. 160.
18. Lindsell, H. & Mooneyham, S. (ed.): *op. cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 173–179.
19. Johnston, A.P.: *op. cit.*, p. 215.
20. Lindsell, H. & Mooneyham, S. (ed.): *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 32.
21. Johnston, A.P.: *op. cit.*, p. 215.
22. Johnston, A.P.: *op. cit.*, p. 18. In this respect Johnston's diagram of the history of the ecumenical movement is very interesting:



23. Cf. Lindsell, H. & Mooneyham, S. (ed.): *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 333–335 and 95–103.
24. The Lausanne Covenant, together with papers read at the congress, is published in the official reference volume, viz. Douglas, J.D. (ed.): *Let the earth hear his voice*.
25. Douglas, J.D. (ed.): *op. cit.*, p. 5.
26. Stott, J.: "The significance of Lausanne", in *IRM*, vol. 64, 1975, p. 292. Cf. also Johnston, A.P.: *op. cit.*, p. 318.
27. Cf. the Lausanne Covenant, para. 7 (quoted above); also Blocher's paper in Douglas, J.D. (ed.): *op. cit.*, p. 380.
28. Cf. 3.1.5 above.
29. Stott, J.: *op. cit.*, p. 292.
30. Quoted in Johnston, A.P.: *op. cit.*, p. 293.
31. Douglas, J.D. (ed.): *op. cit.*, p. 5.
32. *Ibid.*
33. Cf. p. 82 above.
34. Johnston, A.P.: *op. cit.*, p. 324.
35. This declaration can be found in Künneht, W. & Beyerhaus, P. (ed.): *Reich Gottes oder Weltgemeinschaft?*
36. With this term Beyerhaus wanted to state that the only correct attitude to ecumenicalism was one of sharp theological controversy – discussions and reconciliation were not possible. According to him, the Lausanne covenant, however, served only to disarm evangelicals theologically and therefore served no useful purpose.
37. Beyerhaus' argument can be found in Künneht, W. & Beyerhaus, P. (ed.): *op. cit.*, pp. 301–310. Criticism of the Lausanne covenant from within evangelical ranks can also be found in Johnston, A.P.: *op. cit.*, p. 297.
38. Gensichen, H.-W.: *Glaube für die Welt*, pp. 80–95.
39. Cf. e.g. the Greek word for agreeing, *sumphōnēō*, which means the harmony created by different tones. The same is true of the image used most often in connection with the unity of the Church, viz. that of a body with its diverse members. Cf. also what Paul says about evangelism (!) in Phil. 1: 13–18.
40. Cf. Ephes. 3: 16–19.
41. Cf. Beyerhaus' comments on Lausanne, pp. 92–93 above.
42. For a more extensive discussion of this argument, cf. Müller-Fahrenholz, G.: *Unity in today's world*, pp. 200–205.
43. The Frankfurt Declaration and a short history of its conception can be found in Beyerhaus, P.: *Missions: which way?*
44. Cf. Beyerhaus, P.: *Bangkok 73: the beginning or end of world mission?*, pp. 97–99.
45. "Yesterday", No.s 6/7, Jan. 5/6 1973. WCC Archives.
46. Cf. our earlier comment on the difference in approach and history between American and European evangelicals, p. 77 above.

## UNITY AND MISSION

# 6 In eucharistic perspective: the contribution of the Orthodox churches

### 1. Introduction

The Orthodox churches, a communion of autocephalous and autonomous churches,<sup>1</sup> were the first to recommend officially the formation of a fellowship or league of churches. This was done in the encyclical of 1920 of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.<sup>2</sup> Since the meeting of Life and Work in 1925 in Stockholm, therefore, they were committed to the ecumenical movement as *churches*, and also committed to giving this movement firmer and more "official" ecclesiastical shape. For this reason alone the concept of unity in the Orthodox churches is of particular importance for this study. As has been stated above, however, the main reason for devoting a separate chapter to Orthodox thinking on the subject of unity and mission, is their very distinctive contribution, as will be pointed out below.

Before this can be dealt with, however, it is necessary to point out that

the Orthodox churches had great problems in accepting the fact of the integration of the IMC (of which none of them had been a member) and the WCC. This was the result mainly of the deep suspicion with which Orthodoxy regarded the Protestant missionary endeavour, viz. mainly as a campaign of proselytism, intent on coaxing away Orthodox members from the churches to which they traditionally and culturally belonged. It was also partly the result of the completely different (unique) Orthodox concept of mission, which will be discussed in greater detail below. In many Protestant circles, however, these reservations were misunderstood as being simply the result of a total lack of missionary spirit. For the Orthodox churches, therefore, the whole process of integration had been a traumatic experience.<sup>3</sup> All these factors need to be borne in mind in the subsequent discussion of the Orthodox churches' approach to unity and mission.

## 2. The Orthodox concept of Unity

Trying to articulate the Orthodox concept of unity in written form and theological terms is a process totally foreign to Orthodoxy, where (a) *experience* of the given unity (in eucharistic communion) is much more important than theologizing about unity, and (b) the Western theological concepts are quite strange to, and actually insufficient for, articulating the Orthodox position. What follows on the next few pages is therefore something inherently foreign to Orthodoxy, and it should be borne in mind that what is attempted here is the labours of a Western theologian and is ultimately incapable of adequately expressing Orthodox thinking on, and their experience, of unity.

Another important factor to point out is that Orthodox thinking, especially on unity, but also on mission, has actually changed very little during the years. Therefore, what is presented here as the Orthodox concept of unity and its influence on the world mission of the Church does not necessarily originate only in the period of time covered by this study to the same extent as is the case in other chapters and with other churches or groups. The most important elements in the Orthodox concept of unity, then, are the following:

2.1 The one holy, catholic and apostolic Church of Christ exists in the communion of autocephalous and autonomous Orthodox churches. This is simply a given fact in Orthodox eyes and therefore not really open to discussion. "The Greek Orthodox Church knows and proclaims that she is not dealing with human teaching and human precepts..... She is the

whole and only Church, the Body of Christ, the only mandatory agent of the Apostles. So she only can define the faith..... We do not come to criticise other churches but to help them, to illumine their mind in a brotherly manner by informing them about the teaching of the One Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church which is the Greek Orthodox Church..."<sup>4</sup> In general, however, there is no arrogance in this claim — it is simply stated as a self-evident fact.

Where this attitude differs from that of the Roman Catholic church — which, in the years preceding Vatican II also laid claim to being the one true Church — however, is that the Orthodox churches do not claim, as a result of this assertion, that all other churches should therefore now return to the Orthodox community in order to restore the unity of the Church. Rather, it is the duty of Orthodox churches to enlighten other Christians to the experience of the true Church of Christ, transmitted through the ages by way of Orthodoxy. "Although the Orthodox Church maintains constantly and unshakably its ecclesiological self-understanding as the 'only Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church', nevertheless it follows the way of the love of Christ and the command of the Apostles 'to lay upon you no further burden than these essentials'. The Orthodox Church applies the law of church 'oikonomia' where necessary; and without considering an immobile and static uniformity in secondary matters as a necessary condition for unity (accustomed as it is from its own synodal experience to unity in diversity) it has promoted encounter and co-operation with the Christian churches which are separated from it, with a view to restoring the apostolic tradition and the dynamic renewal of the unchangeable ethos throughout Christendom."<sup>5</sup>

The restoration of unity will come about rather through a return to the doctrinal heritage (common to all churches) of the first seven ecumenical councils. This was clearly stated in the Orthodox statement at the Second Assembly of the WCC at Evanston (1954): "We believe that the return of the communions to the faith of the ancient, united and indivisible Church of the seven ecumenical councils, namely, to the pure and unchanged and common heritage of the forefathers of all divided Christians shall alone produce the desired reunion of all separated Christians. For, only the unity and fellowship of Christians in a common faith shall have as a necessary result their fellowship in the sacraments and their indissoluble unity in love, as members of one and the same body of the One Church of Christ..... We are bound to declare our profound conviction that the Holy Orthodox Church alone has preserved in full and intact 'the faith once delivered unto the saints'."<sup>6</sup> The restoration of unity

will find embodiment in the convocation of a genuine ecumenical council on the doctrinal basis of the first seven ecumenical councils. Such a council's first task would therefore not be to formulate doctrine about unity, but to serve as a means of *experiencing* and *expressing* the unity of the Church of Christ.<sup>7</sup>

2.2 The unity of the Church is a given fact, founded on and eventually giving symbolic expression to the unity within the Trinity. "In Orthodox thinking Church Union is an absolute reality pre-established by God. It is not a 'spiritualized', sentimental, humanistic expression of good will. It is not the result of a human agreement or of the acceptance of a particular confessional position. Unity among Christians is to be identified with the union of the Father and the Son – 'that they may be one, even as we are one' (John 17: 22–23). Unity among men in the Church is the result, the reflection, of the event of the Father's union with Christ by his Spirit realized in the historical Church on the day of Pentecost. The One undivided historical Church is the outcome of God's revelation and his real Presence which is realistically affected in his Communion with men. Unity is not an *attribute* of the Church, but it is its very *life*."<sup>8</sup> That is why unity has existed in the communion of Orthodox churches since Pentecost, because a denial of this unbroken unity would be a denial of the Triune God himself. That is also why any abstract theological discussion of the unity of the Church is impossible (and also indeed impermissible) – after all, one does not *discuss* the Triune God; one experiences his existence in faith and expresses it especially in the liturgical life of the Church. A restoration of unity does not therefore imply primarily a return to the communion of Orthodox churches, but a return to the Triune God himself. It is quite clear that this founding of the unity of the Church in the existence of a Triune God is of great importance in discussing the unity of the Church with Orthodoxy, but also in attempting to understand (as a Westerner) their concept of unity.

2.3 The implications of the cosmic kingship of Christ for the Orthodox concept of unity are therefore related to this rootedness of the Church within the Trinity. This was expressed as follows by Nissiotis at New Delhi: "This unity is expressed in distinctive and unshakable historical forms and inspires that regenerating life-process which will incorporate the whole world into one (Colossians 1: 15–20). The cosmic christological vision of the economy of salvation in this biblical passage reaches its climax with v. 18..... Thus this cosmic vision of salvation does not

remain a theoretical contemplative or eschatological vision. Through the concrete act of God at a certain moment in this (our) time.... everything is decided and realized in this historical Church in which and out of which we live in this world, on this earth. It is therefore at this moment of 'He gave' and at every Church moment that this whole cosmic, universal vision is concretized in and for every Christian community and congregation, which has to grasp its existence as part of an undivided whole, as being unavoidably rooted therein. Therefore we can say that the unity of the Church on the day of Pentecost reveals the mystery of the fact of the Creation of the whole world out of union, through union and for Communion."<sup>9</sup> The cosmic kingship of Christ is clearly not just some theological concept; it is actually embodied and concretized in the whole (one) Church at every moment of history. The unity of the Church thus is grounded in the cosmic kingship of Christ, but must also exist to express that kingship at any and every moment in time. Again it is clear why an absolute (but not arrogant) claim can be made that the communion of Orthodox churches *is* (and has been since Pentecost) the embodiment of the one Church under its cosmic head, Christ.

2.4 Because the communion of Orthodox churches *is* the one Church under the cosmic headship of Christ, it is logical that the unity of the Church must also be closely related to the unity of mankind. This is so because the Church must concretize the cosmic scope of salvation through Christ in this (our) time, which includes the incorporation of the whole world into one (see quotation p. 93). It is for this reason that the Ecumenical Patriarch could call on the WCC to collaborate in movements "towards unity and co-operation among the family of mankind which, though divided, has within it the seeds of the fundamental unity of humanity. For as the human race is linked to the Creator by a single man – the first Adam – so also it is kept in unity with God the Father through a single man, the second Adam."<sup>10</sup> The unity of the unbroken communion of (Orthodox) churches is therefore the symbol of all mankind's link with God the Father through the cosmic king, Christ. For this reason the unity of the Church cannot be visualized apart from the unity of mankind. At the same time, the unity of mankind can also not be visualized apart from the unity of the Church. This provides one of the reasons why the unity of the Church has to exist at all times as a visible, concrete reality – i.e., why the unity of the communion of Orthodox churches has had to exist since Pentecost, "in unity with God the Father through..... the second Adam." The Orthodox concept of the unity of the Church has therefore always to be seen in the perspective

of this concept of the unity of mankind.

2.5 Finally, the whole Orthodox concept of the unity of the Church is concretely and fully expressed and experienced in the eucharistic communion of members of the Church. Here we are really at the heart of the matter as far as Orthodox are concerned. This concept of the unity of the Church was clearly (even passionately) articulated by Argenti at Nairobi: "Jesus himself identified his risen body with the assembly of believers: they dwell in him and therefore are united in him. 'Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood dwells continually in me, and I dwell in him' (John 6:56). Those who communicate in the flesh of the Risen Christ are therefore united in one body, the body of Christ who is the Church. It is therefore by dwelling within the body of the Risen Christ, by sharing in Holy Communion or the Lord's Supper that the followers of Christ find each other. The gathering of the congregation for the celebration of the eucharist is the laboratory which transforms the community of believers into the Church, and thereby ensures their unity..... here the believers discover communion and become the Church..... This means that belief in Christian unity, belief in the unity of the Church, belief in the resurrection and belief in the mystery of the eucharist are one and the same belief..."<sup>1</sup>

This is *inter alia* the reason why the Orthodox churches even today refuse to participate in the so-called practice of "inter-communion" – because there can be no such thing as the "inter-communion" of divided churches. There can only be the one eucharistic communion of the one Church of Christ: the communion of Orthodox churches. It is, after all, in fact the shared eucharistic communion which constitutes the Church of Christ. Sharing in communion with other churches would therefore imply recognizing the existence of more than one Church, which, as has been pointed out in 2.1–2.4 above, is simply impossible. As this eucharistic communion constitutes the Church, it forms also the foundation for the unity of the Church: "The gathering of the congregation for the celebration of the eucharist is the laboratory which transforms the community of believers into the Church, and thereby ensures their unity." All other elements of the Orthodox concept of the unity of the Church therefore find their fulfilment, and are only adequately expressed and experienced in, the eucharistic community. Unity in Orthodox eyes can therefore always only be unity in eucharistic fellowship – hence the title of this chapter. The next task is now to try (however inadequately through Western eyes and in Western theological terms and thought forms) also to articulate the Orthodox concept of mission,

especially as it has been influenced by the concept of unity.

### 3. The Orthodox Concept of Mission

3.1 Mission in Orthodox terms is *missio Dei* in the strictest trinitarian sense of the word. "The mission of the Church is based on Christ's mission. A proper understanding of the mission requires, in the first place, an application of Trinitarian Theology..... Trinitarian Theology points to the fact that God is in Himself a life of communion and that His involvement in history aims at drawing man and creation in general into this communion with God's very life..... Mission does not primarily aim at the propagation or transmission of intellectual convictions, doctrines, moral commands, etc., but at the transmission of the life of communion which exists in God. The 'sending' of mission is essentially the sending of the Spirit (John 14:26), who manifests precisely the life of God as communion."<sup>1 2</sup>

As the unity of the Church is founded on and has to give concrete expression to the unity within the Trinity, so also the primary object of the mission of the Church is to point to and concretize the life of communion within the life of the Triune God. The theology of the apostolate (which exerted such a strong influence on developments in missionary thinking in the ecumenical movement (see Chapter 2)), with its strong emphasis on the *world*, is therefore foreign to the Orthodox concept of mission. Mission in the Orthodox churches is therefore essentially inward-looking, directed towards the Church, and the Triune God as the well-spring of the life and being of the Church, and not outward-looking towards the world outside the Church *in the same sense* as Protestant mission in general.<sup>1 3</sup> This was probably a strong contributory factor to the misunderstandings and hesitancy surrounding the Orthodox attitude towards the integration of the WCC and IMC (cf. pp. 90–91 above). In the perspective of the Orthodox claim to be *the* one true Church of Christ, transmitting the experience of life in communion with the Triune God uninterrupted since the day of Pentecost, it is therefore also unavoidable that Orthodox mission should claim not only a position of primacy, but actually one of uniqueness.

3.2 As a consequence of 3.1, Orthodox mission is regarded almost exclusively as the continuation of the Church in order to make possible the sharing in the expression and experience of the essential life of the Triune God. In describing Orthodox missiology, Nissiotis can therefore

state, "Die ekklesiologische Grundlage der Mission soll verhindern, dass die Missionstätigkeit sich von dem Ereignis der Kirche, an das sie untrennbar gebunden ist, loslöst. Denn Mission ist die Art und Weise, in der die Glieder der Kirche die Gnade Gottes den Menschen ausserhalb der Kirche verkünden und übermitteln oder versuchen, den schlafenden Glauben der Namenchristen zu wecken. Von dieser Zielsetzung her erhält das ganze missionarische Unternehmen seinen tief ekklesiologischen Charakter. Es wäre ein grosser Irrtum anzunehmen, dass durch die Diskussion sozialer Fragen oder eine Analyse der säkularen Umwelt, durch die Behebung der Schul- und Bildungsnot oder materieller Missstände Mission getrieben wird. Solche Massnahmen sollten nicht als Mittel der Evangelisation verwandt werden, obwohl sie zur missionarischen Tätigkeit im weiteren Sinne gehören. Eine derartige Tätigkeit darf jedoch niemals zum Selbstzweck werden. Der Zweck ist nicht einmal die Verkündigung des Evangeliums allein oder die Verbreitung einer christlichen Weltanschauung, sondern die Errichtung der eucharistischen Gemeinschaft durch die Taufe."<sup>14</sup>

Mission can therefore (in Orthodox theology) only be defined in strictly ecclesiological terms (more or less the exact opposite of Hoekendijk's viewpoint!). It would in fact be legitimate to speak of Orthodox mission as being "ecclesiomonistic". Furthermore, mission not only has *as its goal* the planting of the Church, but actually mission *takes place* only in and through the liturgical life of the Church. Orthodox mission, therefore, does not see as its prime responsibility the crossing of frontiers and conquering of new territories, but rather as guaranteeing "the continuity of the Church in time" and "the transmission of the faith (i.e. in terms of trinitarian life) from age to age."<sup>15</sup>

3.3 This ecclesiological and trinitarian understanding of mission compels consideration of the implications of the cosmic kingship of Christ for Orthodox mission. This is actually of great importance in understanding the Orthodox concept of mission, for, as Bria writes, "For the Orthodox, the main ground of mission is *the cosmic dimension of the event of Redemption*. The whole universe (*oikoumene*) is redeemed by the life-giving sacrifice of the Son of God incarnate, through whom all things came into existence (John 1:10). Therefore the Good News is not proclaimed as a 'surprise' but as a fulfilment of the expectation of humanity to be delivered from servitude of corruption. Not only the physical universe, but also human beings are waiting for adoption as sons (Rom. 8: 19-23). The whole of creation is in the process of becoming *ecclesia*, the Church, the Body of Christ."<sup>16</sup> The missionary

implications of the cosmic kingship of Christ therefore finds expression in the hope that the whole world is going to become *ecclesia*, that the whole creation *longs* to become *ecclesia*, so that it can share in the experience of trinitarian life as sons of God. That is also another reason why the "continuity of the Church in time" is of prime importance for the mission of the Church, because only by way of the faithful transmission of the faith from age to age by the Church through its mission can the (inevitable) cosmic headship of Christ (centred in the Church) eventually be realized.

3.4 Finally, the whole Orthodox concept of mission (as all other aspects of Orthodox church life) can be defined adequately only in terms of the liturgy, specifically the eucharist. That is why the Orthodox churches can issue a missionary statement entitled, "Confessing Christ through the Liturgical life."<sup>17</sup> The liturgy mentioned here is defined by Orthodoxy in the following terms: "Both in the Gospel and in the Liturgy, Jesus Christ is continually offering Himself as 'the Way, the Truth, and the Life' (John 14:6). Because Orthodox Liturgy is founded on the Word of God and is permeated by it, it is of particular importance for evangelism... The Liturgy becomes a living Word of God addressed to people."<sup>18</sup> This explains inter alia why the aim of Orthodox mission is not *primarily* the crossing of (any kind of) frontiers, but the continuation of the Church through the ages so that this liturgy, as a living word of God addressed to people as a call to join the liturgical community, can be celebrated continuously. For without the liturgy, there is no possibility of mission, of really confessing Christ in the world.

The centre and well-spring of this liturgy is of course the Eucharist. Therefore the celebration of the Eucharist also entails very important missionary considerations. These are expressed by Bria as follows: "The liturgical assembly is the Father's House, where the invitation to the banquet of the heavenly bread is constantly voiced and addressed not only to the members of the Church, but also to non-Christians and strangers.... There is a double movement in the Liturgy: on the one hand, the assembling of the people of God to perform the memorial of the death and resurrection of our Lord 'until He comes again'. It also manifests and realizes the process by which 'the *cosmos* is becoming *ecclesia*'.... On the other hand, renewed by the Holy Communion and the Holy Spirit, the members of the Church are sent to bear authentic testimony to Jesus Christ in the world. The mission of the Church rests upon the radiating and transforming power of the Liturgy. It is a stimulus in sending out the people of God to the world to confess the Gospel

and to be involved in man's liberation."<sup>19</sup>

This, then, is why without the Church there can be no mission according to the Orthodox concept, as the Church as the eucharistic fellowship is a prerequisite for mission. And this is also why the primary consideration of the Orthodox in mission is the continuation of the Church as an expression and experience of the life of the Triune God (an aspect of the Orthodox concept of mission which has often in the past, especially at the time of the integration of the IMC and WCC, been interpreted by Western churches as a lack of missionary spirit). Orthodox mission, therefore, can be described as the liturgy *in* the Liturgy, as well as the liturgy *after* the Liturgy. What is self-evident, however, is that mission simply cannot take place separately from the liturgy as centred in the Eucharist. One has to conclude, therefore, that the Orthodox concept of mission is mainly centripetal in character.

#### 4. The interrelationship between Unity and Mission

From what has been said above about the Orthodox concept of mission, it is clear that this was directly influenced by the concept of unity. The most important characteristics of this interrelationship according to the Orthodox point of view, seem to be the following:

4.1 The interrelationship of unity and mission in Orthodox theology is characterized by its radical emphasis on the unity of the Church as a condition and basis for the mission of the Church. As Nissiotis puts it, "Mission als Ergebnis des inneren Lebens der Kirche kann nur von der einen, ungeteilten Kirche ausgehen."<sup>20</sup> This is so because the one Church of Christ shares and expresses in its life and being the life of the triune God (cf. 2.2 above). "Unity and mission coincide in the nature of the Church; for mission means: sharing directly in the grace of God the Holy Trinity in his Church. It does not imply witness and service apart from unity, but out of, in and for this unity. Mission is the calling of all the peoples of the world to become partakers, in repentance, through the mysteries of the Church, in that Oneness which is the origin, essence and being of the Church, through the regenerating, all-embracing and uniting mysteries of the Holy Spirit."<sup>21</sup> This interrelationship is of fundamental importance therefore in understanding the Orthodox view of the mission of the Church. According to this point of view, what is regarded as *mission* in the Western churches is thus simply missions, the multiplication of (schismatic) churches, or even proselytism, but certainly not the true mission of the one Church of Christ.

4.2 This interrelationship between unity and mission is not some feature in the life of the Church which might be regarded as an optional extra. Rather it is an essential quality of the life and being of the Church without which it ceases to be the Church of Christ. "Mission is not to be related exclusively to the 'apostolicity' but to all the 'notae' of the Church, including unity, holiness and catholicity. This affects the concept of Mission in a decisive way, since it removes it from the realm of quantity to become a qualitative reality.... the holiness, unity and catholicity (which is not to be confused with geographical expansion and universality) determine the notion of Mission more than any success in numbers. This ecclesiological perspective implies that Mission is ultimately concerned with pointing to a quality of existence which reflects that of the Trinity."<sup>2</sup> According to this ecclesiological point of view, any polarization between ecumenism and evangelism is quite impossible, as it is foreign to the nature of the Church of Christ.

4.3 The interrelationship between unity and mission finds its fullest expression in the Orthodox churches in the Eucharist. "In the Eucharist 'the Church becomes what it is', fulfills itself as the body of Christ, as the divine *parousia* – the presence and the communication of Christ and of His Kingdom. Orthodox ecclesiology is indeed eucharistic ecclesiology. For in the Eucharist the Church accomplishes the *passage* from this world into the world to come, into the *eschaton*; participates in the ascension of its Lord and in His messianic banquet.... Thus the whole life of the Church is rooted in the Eucharist.... This is indeed the *mission* of the Church.... The Church is fulness and its home is in heaven. But this fullness is given to the world, sent into the world as its salvation and redemption. The eschatological nature of the Church is not the negation of the world, but, on the contrary, its affirmation and acceptance as the object of divine love. Or, in other terms, the entire 'other-worldliness' of the Church is nothing but the sign and the reality of the love of God for this world, the very condition of the Church's mission to the world. The Church thus is not a 'self-centered' community, but precisely a missionary community, whose purpose is salvation not from, but of, the world. In the Orthodox experience and faith it is the Church-sacrament that makes possible the Church-mission."<sup>2 3</sup> The interrelationship between unity and mission in Orthodox thinking can thus be termed a sacramental reality. That is why the unity of the Church is the condition for and basis of the mission of the Church. That is also why Orthodox mission is so strongly centripetal in character; for where the one Church celebrates the Eucharist, there the mission of the Church is indeed fulfilled.

## 5. Evaluation

5.1 The Orthodox position can certainly serve as a necessary corrective to many present-day points of view on the interrelationship between unity and mission, as the tendency is often to emphasize one at the expense of the other. In this respect the Orthodox witness can play a very important bridging rôle in ecumenical discussions. "Die Theologen müssten heute wieder zu der Erkenntnis gelangen, dass die Ekklesiologie zwei extreme Elemente miteinander verbindet und enthält, ohne eines der beiden zu vernachlässigen, zu verwischen oder zu leugnen. Durch das 'Zusammenleben' der Kirchen wird der Ekklesiologie heute die Aufgabe gestellt, das Wesen der einen Kirche, nämlich ihr Leben, das Leben der Katholizität und Apostolizität, der Einheit und der Mission, der Fülle der Evangelisation, zu erläutern und zu beleuchten."<sup>24</sup> In this process the holistic view of Orthodoxy can present a valuable foundation on which to build.

5.2 Orthodox theology reveals the tendency, in dealing with the subject of *unity and mission*, to replace both unity and mission by *the (Orthodox) Church* (cf. note 17). The result is two-fold. On the one hand, it can result in an (unintentional?) overvaluation of the Church, in which the Church almost becomes the Kingdom of God: "..... die Welt besitzt jetzt ein konkretes Mittel der Gnade: die Kirche. Sie übermittelt die erneute Gnade Gottes und erneuert selbst das Ganze der Schöpfung zur Rückkehr zur persönlichen Gemeinschaft mit Gott."<sup>25</sup> On the other hand, it can lead to a church which is turned in on itself to such an extent that it loses touch with the world in which it exists. In the former case, both ecumenism (unity) and mission will have a false goal. In the latter case, both the unity of the Church and its mission will be irrelevant.

5.3 One cannot escape from the impression that the Orthodox point of view on unity and mission is the result of, but can also result in, a very static doctrine of the Church and its mission. As long as the Orthodox Eucharist is celebrated somewhere, the one Church of Christ still exists, and its most important (sole?) mission is to preserve that celebration of the Eucharist so that it can serve as a light which eventually must enlighten and draw people/the world to itself. However, even if the world is not drawn to it, its mission would still have been accomplished. It is a moot point whether the world is taken seriously if such an attitude prevails. Is it not possible that this point of view is mainly the result of (a) the minority position of many Orthodox churches in countries where

they originally were state churches; and (b) the *diaspora* condition of the Orthodox churches in the West?

## 6. Conclusion

By the time of the WCC Assembly at Nairobi in 1975 there were signs that the Orthodox churches were becoming more actively involved in ecumenical discussions on unity and mission. One of the important signs is to be found in the reaction of the Russian Orthodox Church (which was probably representative of Orthodox reaction in general) to Bangkok.<sup>26</sup> This is to be regarded as part of the general rediscovery of the Orthodox missionary *ethos* taking place at that time and admirably presented later in *Martyria/Mission*. Zaphiris is therefore correct in pointing out that Orthodox participation in Nairobi was different from their participation in previous ecumenical gatherings: "Diese neue Art und Weise der Mitarbeit der Orthodoxen Kirche in der ÖRK (i.e. at Nairobi – W.S.) entspricht völlig dem Geist ihrer Eingliederung als volle Mitglieder und nicht dem Status eines einfachen Beobachters. Als ein existenzielles Glied des ÖRK begnügt sie sich nicht mehr damit, den eigenen Glauben durch Sondererklärungen ihrer Delegierten darzuliegen, bzw. die offiziellen Berichte der Vollversammlungen abzulehnen."<sup>27</sup> It is appropriate, therefore, now to turn to another important event in the ecumenical discussions on unity and mission: the WCC assembly at Nairobi.

## Notes

1. It is very important to bear in mind that there is no single Orthodox church (comparable to the Roman Catholic church), but that all Orthodox churches are autocephalous and autonomous. For a brief and clear discussion of the structure of Orthodox churches, see Bria, I. (ed.): *Martyria/Mission*, pp. 75–76; cf. also Meyendorff, J.: *The Orthodox Church*, pp. 142–189.
2. The Ecumenical Patriarch is considered as first in rank among the Orthodox hierarchy, but his position is not analogous to that of the Pope. The encyclical can be found in Patelos, C. (ed.): *The Orthodox church in the ecumenical movement*, pp. 40–43.
3. Cf. the speech on the proposed integration made by the Bishop of San Francisco at the meeting of the Central Committee of the WCC at Rhodes (1959): "(Orthodox theologians) are afraid that integration brings into the ecumeni-

cal principles of the World Council of Churches itself an ecclesiological change into a principle which is the root of the World Council.... accepting integration we of course must warn our Protestant Christian brethren that this integration will not only be a trial for us, but also a trial for them and for the whole Christian ecumenical spirit of freedom and thought.... The freedom of each member of the World Council of Churches is not only the freedom to join the World Council and to dwell in it, but also to leave the Council in the moment when the inner truth of our faith and religious conscience requires it." WCC Archives, Joint Committee WCC/IMC.

4. Statement of the Orthodox delegates at the Faith and Order meeting, Lund, 1952, as quoted by Patelos, C. (ed.): *op. cit.*, p. 89.
5. Metropolitan Meliton: "The re-encounter of the Eastern and the Western Church", in *ER*, vol. 17, 1965, p. 306.
6. Quoted in Patelos, C. (ed.): *op. cit.*, p. 95.
7. The WCC cannot be considered as such a genuine ecumenical council, as "it does not itself possess anything of the nature and marks of a Church, and therefore has no ecclesiological substance", and because the Roman Catholic Church is not a member of it – cf. Meliton: *op. cit.*, pp. 305–306.
8. Nissiotis, N.: "The witness and the service of Eastern Orthodoxy to the one undivided Church", in Patelos, C. (ed.): *op. cit.*, pp. 231–232. Cf. also Bobrinskoy, B.: "The continuity of the Church and Orthodoxy", in *ER*, vol. 16, 1963–64, pp. 514–515.
9. Quoted in Patelos, C. (ed.): *op. cit.*, pp. 232–233.
10. Declaration of the Ecumenical Patriarchate on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the WCC, as quoted by Patelos, C. (ed.): *op. cit.*, p. 63.
11. Archimandrite Cyril Argenti in a speech on Christian unity at the Nairobi Assembly of the WCC in 1975, as quoted by Patelos, C. (ed.): *op. cit.*, p. 345. Cf. also Bobrinskoy, B.: *op. cit.*, pp. 515–516.
12. Report *Unity and Mission*, Consultation on "Confessing Christ Today", Bucharest, 1974, as quoted by Patelos, C. (ed.): *op. cit.*, p. 105.
13. This is not to deny the proud record of evangelization of large parts of the world, particularly of Asia, by the Orthodox churches. (Brief surveys of the history of Orthodox mission in unevangelized areas can be found in Zernov, N.: *op. cit.*, pp. 47–50, and Bria, I. (ed.): *op. cit.*, pp. 21–23). Even where Orthodox churches were founded in new areas, however, the main emphasis was on drawing the outside world in towards the Church, and not the other way round (i.e. the lure of "heathen lands far, far away" continually drawing the Church out into the world).
14. Nissiotis, N.A.: *Die Theologie der Ostkirche im ökumenischen Dialog*, p. 195.
15. Bria, I. (ed.): *Martyria/Mission*, p. 4. Cf. also pp. 8–9.
16. Bria, I. (ed.): *op. cit.*, p. 7.
17. This document can be found in Bria, I. (ed.): *op. cit.*, pp. 231–234.
18. Report "The Bible and Liturgical life", as quoted by Bria, I. (ed.): *op. cit.*, p. 235.
19. Bria, I. (ed.): *op. cit.*, p. 68. Cf. also Schmemmann's clear definition in Schmemmann, A.: *Church, World, Mission*, p. 30.

20. Nissiotis, N.A.: *op. cit.*, p. 197.
21. Nissiotis in a speech at New Delhi, as quoted by Patelos, C. (ed.): *op. cit.*, pp. 240–241.
22. Report *Unity and Mission*, Consultation on "Confessing Christ Today", Bucharest, 1974, as quoted in Patelos, C. (ed.): *op. cit.*, p. 106.
23. Schmemmann, A.: *Church, World, Mission*, pp. 212–214.
24. Nissiotis, N.A.: *op. cit.*, p. 207.
25. Nissiotis, N.A.: *op. cit.*, pp. 153–154. Cf. also Schmemmann, A.: *op. cit.*, pp. 38–39.
26. This message was published in *IRM*, Vol. 63, No. 249, pp. 125–129.
27. Zaphiris, C.: "Die Teilnahme der Orthodoxen Kirche an der fünften Vollversammlung des Ökumenischen Rates der Kirchen in Nairobi", in *OR*, 25. Jahrgang, Heft 2, 1976, p. 273.