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obedience of faith*

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Editorial

This issue marks a new phase for the *Evangelical Review of Theology* (ERT) with the retirement of its long-time editor, **Dr Bruce J. Nicholls** to concentrate on other editorial and teaching projects. Dr Nicholls was editor for most of its twenty-two volumes to date. ERT was founded by him in 1977 while he was Executive Director of the World Evangelical Fellowship Theological Commission, and he edited until his retirement from that position in 1986. In 1991 he accepted an invitation to take over the journal once more. The Theological Commission warmly expresses its profound thanks for his vision, energy and skill in conceiving and producing this journal, often in the midst of a busy schedule while at work in India and travelling the world in the interests of evangelical theology and the Commission. The Index of articles up to the end of Volume 22, published as a handy separate volume with this issue, is a tangible symbol of Dr Nicholls' editorial labours.

Dr Nicholls was well served by our publishers, Paternoster Press, and especially **Mr Jeremy Mudditt**, now of Jeremy Mudditt Publishing Services, who is involved on a day to day basis with its production. Bruce was also ably assisted by his wife, Kathleen, who not only supported him personally, but took an active part in the editorial process, especially in proof reading.

The particular focus of ERT which Dr Nicholls developed will remain for the time being. Conscious always of people in the non-western countries who would not have good access to libraries and journals, he selected significant articles from around the world, both original and already published, at first on a range of topics, but later focused on a particular theme. Thus each issue became a digest of classic and contemporary thinking on issues of importance to evangelicals, while the thematic issues constituted a mini-library on topics ranging from contextualization and suffering to preaching, mission and theological education.

With this issue we welcome **Dr James J. Stamoolis** as Executive Director of the WEF Theological Commission. He was Dean of Wheaton Graduate School, Illinois USA 1989–98 and Associate Professor of Missions/Intercultural Studies. From 1981 to 1989 he worked with the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students, especially among theological and pastoral students. During the 1970s he was a missionary in South Africa serving as a Bible College lecturer and in student work. His doctorate is from the University of Stellenbosch and has been published as *Eastern Orthodox Mission Theology*. He brings to the Commission a wide and dynamic vision of the importance of theological work for Christian life and witness.

Also marking a new era in the life of the Theological Commission we record in this issue the passing of **Dr Paul Schrotenboer**, Convenor of the WEF Theological Commission's Ecumenical Affairs Study Unit. It is most appropriate that the sad duty of writing a tribute should fall to his close colleague, former editor, Dr Bruce Nicholls. It is also appropriate that we are able to publish in this issue papers from the last project undertaken by Dr Schrotenboer for the Theological Commission, the conversations between the World Evangelical Fellowship and the Roman Catholic Church at Tantur, Jerusalem 12–19 October, 1997. They are introduced by **Dr George Vandervelde** of Canada, who has been appointed to succeed Dr Schrotenboer in this area of the Commission's work.

David Parker, Editor.

Paul Schrottenboer 1922–1998

A Man of Vision and Courage

Bruce J. Nicholls

Dr Paul G. Schrottenboer, a faithful and untiring leader in the WEF Theological Commission, died on July 16 1998 after a long battle with cancer.

I first met Paul when he was General Secretary of the Reformed Ecumenical Synod, a position he held for 25 years. I had the privilege of representing the Theological Commission at a Synod held in France and remember his firm but gracious leadership of the meetings. I remember the place he gave to the reading of Scripture at every meal in his home in Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA. In Paul we have lost a friend and active supporter of evangelical ecumenicity. Global evangelicalism is the poorer for his passing.

After the WEF presented its report on 'A Contemporary Evangelical Perspective on Roman Catholicism' at its General Assembly in Singapore in 1986, Paul, on behalf of the Theological Commission, pioneered the continuing dialogue with the Pontifical Council for the Promoting of Christian Unity of the Vatican. He led brief meetings in Jerusalem in 1988 and Budapest in 1990 and two major consultations, one at Venice in 1993 and the second at Tantur, Jerusalem in 1997. The papers of these latter two consultations have been published in *Evangelical Review of Theology*. At these meetings fundamental issues were clarified on Scripture, Tradition, Justification, the Church, and Mission; many Catholic misunderstandings concerning the evangelical position were removed and foundations were laid for future discussions.

Paul was a man for biblical ecumenicity, a loyal churchman in the Reformed tradition and an able theologian and writer on contemporary issues. During the past ten years ERT has published ten of his articles and reports including some incisive reflections on the publications of the World Council of Churches.

He was also a man of patience and great courage. With steadily declining health and even after major limb surgery, he persevered for the work of the Kingdom. He planned to attend the Theological Commission meetings in Germany in early June, just six weeks before the Lord called him.

Without the support of his wife Bernice, Paul could never have achieved what he did. She was at his side in travel and in meetings and in times of severe weakness and suffering. We commend her and their adult family to the Lord. We thank God for every memory of our dear brother.

Dr. Paul G. Schrottenboer was born near Holland, Michigan in 1922 and trained for the ministry of the Christian Reformed Church at Calvin Seminary (graduated 1947) and later studied at Westminster Theological Seminary. He gained his doctorate from the Free University of Amsterdam. He served pastorates in Canada 1955–1963 and was active in a movement there to create a Christian university, becoming part-time development director of Association for the Advancement of Christian Scholarship (now Institute for Christian Studies, Toronto, Canada). In 1966 he moved to Grand Rapids, Michigan as General Secretary of the Reformed Ecumenical Synod (later Council). In this post for 25 years, he carried out distinguished work in North America and on the world scene, especially in relationship to the issue of apartheid in South Africa. Upon his retirement,

he again supported the interests of Christian higher education. Although suffering with cancer from 1990, Dr Schrotenboer continued to devote himself to his family, ecumenical and educational interests until his death on 16 July 1998.

Introduction

George Vandervelde

World Evangelical Fellowship/Roman Catholic Church Conversations on the nature and mission of the Church, Tantur, Jerusalem, 12–19 October, 1997

The papers published in this issue of *Evangelical Review of Theology* (ERT) were prepared for the second consultation between representatives of the World Evangelical Fellowship (WEF) and representatives of Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. The meeting took place 12–19 October, 1997, at the Tantur Ecumenical Institute for Theological Studies (located between Jerusalem and Bethlehem).

The most recent consultation is part of an ongoing conversation that began formally in 1993 but was prompted by an event that occurred more than a decade earlier. At the 1980 General Assembly of the WEF, held in Hoddesdon, England, two representatives from the Roman Catholic Church had been invited to attend the assembly as observers. Their presence, and especially their official greetings to the Assembly, triggered a heated debate. This led the WEF Theological Commission to establish a Task Force on Ecumenical Issues, which was mandated to present an Evangelical assessment of contemporary Roman Catholicism. When the resultant statement (published in ERT 10:4 (1986) 342–364; 11:1 (1987) 78–94; and in booklet form as *Roman Catholicism: A Contemporary Evangelical Perspective*, ed. Paul G. Schrotenboer (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988)) came to the attention of the Vatican office on Christian unity, it suggested further discussion of the issues raised in the statement. After some preparatory meetings between representatives of the WEF (headed by Dr. Paul Schrotenboer) and of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, the first consultation took place in Venice in 1993. The topics discussed there were Scripture and Tradition, and Justification by Faith. The papers and responses to them were subsequently published in ERT (21:2 (1997) 101–154).

During the discussion in Venice it became clear that intertwined with the topics under discussion are two others that tend to divide Evangelicals and Roman Catholics: the nature of the church as community of Christ and the nature and practice of mission and evangelism. These interrelated topics became the foci of the Tantur consultation. Each topic was addressed in a Roman Catholic and an Evangelical paper. All four papers are published in this issue.

In discussing the ecclesiological papers, various issues sprang to the fore. One of these concerns the question, What is the defining characteristic of the church? Through careful listening to one another, it became clear that it is too easy to contrast Evangelical and Roman Catholic understandings of the church in terms of ‘word’ and ‘sacrament’, respectively. The Roman Catholic discussion partners understand their ecclesiology as placing equal emphasis on both. Nevertheless, from an Evangelical viewpoint, Roman Catholic teaching appears to assign sacramentality a pivotal role in understanding, not only the nature of the church as such, but also the nature, ranking, and validity of ordained

ministry, and the relation of the sacraments to salvation. In an Evangelical conception of the church, on the other hand, the generative role of the word is so central that it cannot simply be juxtaposed with the sacrament. Rather than giving equal emphasis to word and sacrament, Evangelicals consider the sacraments to be wholly subservient to the word. Although in Evangelicalism such subservience is entirely compatible with a high view of the sacraments, it can also lead to their denigration.

A related issue of discussion at Tantar concerned the meaning of the Reformation adage, *ecclesia reformata semper reformanda est*, 'a reformed church is to be ever reforming'. This call may be seen as the critical ramification of the centrality of the word mentioned above. This reforming imperative goes to the heart of Reformational ecclesiology. The church in all its dimensions is constantly called to be accountable to the word of her Lord. It is striking that the Second Vatican Council too emphasizes the need for the constant renewal of the church. Significantly, the Council's challenge for renewal resounds most pointedly in the context of ecumenism: engagement with other ecclesial communities calls for mutual renewal, even conversion. In exploring the mutual significance of *semper reformanda* the Evangelical participants probed the scope of potential renewal within the Roman Catholic Church: in what sense is the church considered to be a divine institution; and does this divine quality quarantine any aspect of the church from the call to renewal? On the other hand, the Roman Catholic participants probed the way in which the normativity of Scripture functions in the call for the radical renewal of the church: who decides what the Scriptures demand in the way of the reformation of the church today? If each individual has this right and duty, but the community refuses to heed the self-appointed reformer, is he or she justified in splitting the church?

Another issue that arose directly from the ecclesiological discussion concerns the central question, what truth(s) do Evangelicals and Roman Catholics hold in common? The answer seems, in some sense, obvious. Both confess Jesus Christ as Saviour, as Lord, as human and divine, crucified, risen, returning; both hold a high view of Scripture as the Spirit-breathed word. In terms of confessions, both traditions affirm the contents of the Apostles' and the Nicene Creeds. While acknowledging this, Evangelicals are usually quick to insert an emphatic qualifier: 'but we interpret all these matters differently'. We did not have time to explore this issue at length, though the question arises whether the differences are such that they simply negate what is initially affirmed, namely, the truth(s) held in common. Is the commonness merely appearance? Or does the very suggestion of 'mere appearance' reveal a skewed approach to the question of what we share? Do we allow our different holding of the truth(s)—important as these are—to trump our being held by the truth? Can Evangelicals and Catholics together affirm the statement to which Pope John Paul II appeals, namely, that what unites us is much greater than what divides us? If so, what implications does this imply for our mutual relations?

Many of these issues crystallized when one of the Evangelical participants described the struggle with theological liberalism in his church as a struggle for the soul of the church. This assessment prompted another Evangelical participant to observe that, although the Roman Catholic church too has within it what may be called 'liberal' theologians, one would hardly describe the problem this entails as a struggle for the soul of the Roman Catholic Church. In fact, one explanation for the remarkable development of the U.S. phenomenon called 'Evangelicals and Catholics Together' lies in the fact that, in spite of all the accretions that, in the Roman Catholic tradition, seem to mute the sound of the gospel, Evangelicals observe that the Roman Catholic Church functions in some sense as a mighty bulwark against liberalism. The realization of even this negative commonality in turn gave rise to an obvious question: How has the Roman Catholic Church managed to

maintain a solid core of orthodoxy, while Protestant churches have either slidden into liberalism, or maintained orthodoxy at the cost of ever further splintering? Has the institution which the Evangelicals consider to place itself between the authority of the Scripture and the church, namely, the teaching authority of the Roman Catholic Church, in fact, served to safeguard basic orthodoxy? Here the discussion has come full circle, it seems, returning to the issue of the Venice Consultation: the relation between Scripture and tradition. The next consultations will attempt to move more deeply into the issue of the nature, extent, and significance of communion between separated ecclesial communities.

At the Tantur consultation, mission issues made themselves felt long before they were explicitly discussed on the basis of the papers on mission. Both the intrinsic relation between mission and church and the variety of cultures and peoples represented by those involved in the consultations placed mission-related issues on the agenda from the outset. Sister Maria Ko is a Chinese Professor who teaches theology for half of the year in Rome, while she divides the other half between teaching in Hong Kong and mainland China. Reverend Joseph Duc Dao, who is vice-president of an international missionary centre in Rome, is Vietnamese. Although Father Thomas Stransky is North American and Father Frans Bouwen Belgian, both have made Israel their permanent home, and have been deeply involved in Palestinian/Muslim—Jewish—Christian relations. Among the Evangelical participants Dr. Samuel Escobar teaches in his native Peru, as well as in the USA, and has written extensively on the mission of the church. Dr. Stanley Mutunga is from Kenya, where he teaches at the Nairobi Graduate School of Theology.

Given their richly variegated background, together with the culture and experience of the European and North American based participants, it is hardly surprising that mission-related issues arose throughout the consultation. We were reminded at critical points that the 'Asian mind' resists approaching issues such as 'salvation' or 'church' in piecemeal fashion but deals with them holistically. Moreover, the presence of Asian participants made it impossible to forget how the church there faces a challenge that is strikingly different. We became aware how different the setting for church and mission is in China, for example, where Christians comprise only a small percentage of that huge population, as compared, on the one hand, to the situation in Europe, where Christianity has been a majority religion but now faces a largely secularized society, and as compared, on the other hand, to the situation in many Latin American countries which are predominantly Roman Catholic, and where the Church may feel beleaguered simultaneously by the rapid growth of Evangelicalism and the encroachment of secularism.

The papers on mission led to a discussion on the urgency of the call to mission and on the issue of the relationship of the uniqueness and the universal significance of Jesus Christ. The Roman Catholic and the Evangelical traditions both express great passion for mission. Moreover, in both communions this commitment flows from the same source. It springs from a deep conviction regarding the uniqueness and all-sufficiency of Christ's person and work. Yet, Evangelicals and Roman Catholics tend to draw different conclusions regarding the universal scope of Christ's work. For the Second Vatican Council the conviction that no one is saved apart from Christ, does not lead to the conclusion that all who do not know Christ are lost, but rather that those adherents of other religions who are saved can be saved, in a mysterious way, only through Christ. Evangelicals, by contrast, tend to draw the conclusion that only those who know and believe explicitly in Christ can be saved. Interestingly, it became clear that the Catholic position does not entail soteriological universalism, the notion that every one will be saved.

The other major issue related to mission surrounds the terms 'proselytism' and 'sect' both of which are frequently used to describe the Evangelical activities and communities by the majority church, such as Roman Catholicism in Latin America and Orthodoxy in Russia. These terms refer to missionary practice and attitude, i.e., to the practical matters of 'sheep stealing', of competition versus cooperation, and usually to the relation of a majority church to minority churches. The discussion of these issues, however, quickly zeroed in on the profound theological questions that undergird these practical matters. How does one establish who is an 'authentic Christian'? In determining 'authenticity', what is the relation of the sacraments to a 'personal, saving relationship' with Jesus Christ? What are the assumptions behind calling a group of Christians who have separated from a particular church a 'sect'. At Tantur we made a beginning in clarifying issues such as these, while at the same we heard reports of painful discrepancies between official teaching and policy and the practical relations between Evangelicals and Roman Catholics in various regions.

The first aim of a consultation such as this is greater understanding, both of points of division and of commonness. The second aim is more practical: how do these communities relate to one another in circumstances as different as Africa, Asia, Latin America, and North America? Drawing on the fruits of the previous meetings, the next consultation, to be held in Wheaton, Illinois, will attempt to obtain greater clarity on the relationship of that which unites and that which divides in both faith and practice. As the close of the Communique indicates, the proposed topics are 'communion and cooperation in mission' and 'proselytism and religious freedom in relation to Christian unity'.

Dr George Vandervelde, Senior Member in Systematic Theology at the Institute for Christian Studies, Toronto, Canada, is Convenor of the WEF Theological Commission Ecumenical Affairs Study Unit.

Evangelicals and Catholics Converse About Church and Mission

Communiqué from conversations between members of the World Evangelical Fellowship and the nature and mission of the Church, Tantur, Jerusalem, October 12–19, 1997

In 1993 there was a first meeting in Venice (Italy) for conversations between Evangelical and Roman Catholic representatives, co-sponsored by the World Evangelical Fellowship and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. The themes were Justification, Scripture and Tradition. As a follow up to it, a second meeting for conversations was held in the Ecumenical Institute of Tantur (Jerusalem), October 12–19, 1997. Participants represented different regions of the world and a variety of Christian ministries.

The main themes for these conversations—agreed upon during the Venice meeting—were issues related to the nature and mission of the Church. Representatives of each

tradition presented a paper on each theme. The discussion that followed evidenced a spirit of mutual acceptance and disposition to listen to one another and pray together.

From the discussions, some points of agreement emerged, as well as areas that demand more reflection and theological work. It was felt that it is still too early to present an elaborate document. We therefore limit ourselves to list the main points on which we have come to a common understanding as well as the points that we would suggest as an agenda for the future conversations between the World Evangelical Fellowship and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, if both partners agree to do so.

1. NATURE OF THE CHURCH

- a). The attributes of the Church as one, holy, catholic and apostolic, which we confess with the ancient Creeds, are commonly seen as a fruitful starting point for further study on ecclesiology. Questions were raised about whether these attributes describe an ideal of the Church, or are somehow already present in the existing churches but require greater visible expression.
- b). The concept of real but imperfect communion among Christians and among churches is often used in Roman Catholic documents on ecumenism. Questions were raised about the adequacy of this concept for describing the relationship between Evangelicals and Catholics. Though the concept seemed helpful, it was agreed that more study is needed as to the content and expressions of that imperfect communion, particularly because it has a bearing on relationships in mission.
- c). We agreed that further discussion should be carried on about the Catholic positions on the following points, the appropriateness of using the incarnation as an analogy for the Church, the meaning of sacraments and sacramentality, the essential difference between the priesthood of all believers and the ordained ministry. We also agreed that further discussion should be carried on about the Evangelical positions in regard to the relationship between mission and the Church, as well as mission and unity.

2. THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

- a). Evangelicals and Catholics agree fully about the importance of the missionary nature of the Church. Among Evangelicals this conviction has been expressed in intense missionary activity focused on the communication of the Gospel, demanding personal response 'to the saving work of Jesus Christ. The commitment of the Catholic Church to mission is reflected in its constant missionary activity over the centuries and reaffirmed in several authoritative documents from Vatican II onwards.
- b). Catholics and Evangelicals agree that two basic convictions have to be kept together, namely the uniqueness of Jesus Christ and his atoning work, as well as the universal saving purpose of God. During conversations questions emerged about the relationship between the biblical mandate for mission and the possibility of salvation of non-Christians.
- c). Among the issues we discussed were religious liberty, evangelicalism and proselytism and their relationship to Christian unity. We join together in urging that in future discussions these issues be firmly linked and jointly considered, not as separable questions but as a single set of related concerns.
- d). While recognising the importance of missionary zeal, we call for charity, fairness and mutual consideration in mission activities, especially in places where Christian communities have long existed and borne witness sometimes through costly presence and suffering. Catholics and Evangelicals must work together to protect freedom of conscience for all persons, and to ensure civil guarantees of freedom of assembly, speech and press.

3. RECOMMENDATION

We recommend that further conversations be organised by the WEF Theological Commission and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. We suggest that these begin in 1999, with discussion on communion and cooperation in mission, and proselytism and religious freedom in relation to Christian unity.

PARTICIPANTS:

WEF Members:

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Dr. Thomas Oden, Drew Theological Seminary, Madison, NJ, USA
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Roman Catholic Members:

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The Church as ‘One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic’

Avery Dulles

Keywords: Church, Unity, Holy, Catholic, Apostolic

In the Apostles’ Creed, the standard baptismal creed in the West, belief is professed in ‘the holy catholic Church’. The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, which is based on a local baptismal creed of Eastern provenance, contains a more developed ecclesiology. In it Christians profess their faith in the church as ‘one, holy, catholic, and apostolic’. This most ecumenical of all creeds, promulgated by the First Council of Constantinople, was accepted by the Council of Chalcedon, and has since entered into the liturgies of many Christian churches. Catholics today recite it (with the medieval addition of the *Filioque*) in the Eucharist on Sundays and feast days.

The credal article on the church, however, is by no means unproblematical. How can we confess that the church is one when our eyes show us that Christianity is racked by internal controversy and is divided into hundreds of churches and denominations that refuse to recognize or communicate with one another? How can we speak of the church as holy when its members freely confess themselves to be sinners in continual need of forgiveness? How does the church deserve to be called ‘catholic’ when Catholics and

Christians are a minority, and indeed a diminishing proportion, of the world's population? While some formerly Christian nations are falling away from the faith, vast regions of the world still remain to be evangelized for the first time. How, finally, can we speak of the church as apostolic in view of the radical mutations that it has undergone over the centuries? Many of the structures, doctrines, and practices of contemporary Christians would surprise and baffle the apostles.

It is not immediately clear what claim is made by an assertion of the four attributes. Are they being predicated in a general way of the whole body of Christian believers or specifically of some socially organized body of Christians, such as the Roman Catholic? In either case it must be asked, furthermore: Do the properties designate the actual situation of the church or an ideal to which it must aspire? If these attributes are actually present in the church, one must ask, besides, whether they can be verified by empirical research or are apprehended only by faith. Can the four properties be used as 'notes' or 'marks' to identify the true church as against spurious pretenders? These questions are too large to be handled with any adequacy in a single brief paper. Without fully answering the difficulties, I shall try to summarize the doctrine of the Catholic Church on these points, with some reference to the biblical foundations and the teaching of the Second Vatican Council.

In Catholic apologetics from the sixteenth century until a generation ago, the four properties were regularly used as 'notes', with a view to proving that the Catholic Church, and it alone, was the true church of Christ. The argument consisted of two main stages. In the first stage it was shown on the basis of Scripture and early tradition that the church of Christ must possess all four of these characteristics and possess them visibly. The second stage was a demonstration from history or experience that the Roman Catholic Church, and she alone, possessed these attributes, or at least that she possessed them in a degree clearly superior to any other Christian body.

The First Vatican Council, without precisely adopting the textbook approach, did affirm in its Constitution on Catholic Faith that God had endowed the true church with 'manifest notes so that it could be recognized by all as the guardian and teacher of the revealed word' (DS 3012). The Catholic Church, and she alone, was incontrovertible evidence of her own divine mission, because of 'her astonishing propagation, her outstanding holiness and inexhaustible fruitfulness in every kind of goodness, her catholic unity, and her unconquerable stability' (DS 3013).

Although the tone of Vatican I is too triumphalistic to appeal to the contemporary mood, some recent authors continue to use the four properties to exhibit the credibility of Catholic Christianity. Yves Congar has proposed an 'ostensive' apologetic based predominantly on the note of sanctity.¹ Karl Rahner argues rather from apostolicity, contending that the Roman Catholic Church stands in greater continuity with the primitive church than any other Christian community.² Hermann Josef Pottmeyer, building on the work of Congar and Rahner, contends that the four properties make the Catholic Church a sign and sacrament of the Kingdom of God, which is both a gift and a

¹ 1. Yves Congar, *L'Eglise une, sainte, catholique et apostolique*. *Mysterium Salutis* 15 (Paris: Cerf, 1970), pp. 144–47, 266–67. He maintains that in the Catholic Church one finds a coherent assemblage of elements of sanctity that qualify the Catholic Church as a 'hagiophany' or sacrament of encounter with God. I call his approach 'ostensive' because he points to concrete realities and shuns the deductive form of the argument that was customary in earlier apologetics.

² 2. Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith* (New York: Crossroad, 1982), pp. 357–58.

task (*Gabe* and *Aufgabe*).³ Nearly all contemporary Catholic authors emphasize the dialectic between the 'already' and the 'not yet', between the historical and the eschatological phases of the church. Only at the Parousia will the properties of the church be perfectly realized.

In the documents of the Second Vatican Council, the Constitution on the Church speaks of the unique church of Christ 'which in the creed we profess to be one, holy, catholic, and apostolic' (LG 8). Two observations are here in order.

In the first place, the four properties are here taken as characteristics in which we are to believe rather than as notes that can be empirically verified. Does this mean that there is no empirical evidence to support the church's credibility? Some Protestants, holding to the invisibility of the church and to the self-sufficiency of faith, maintain that we are to believe in the four properties without any support from experience and indeed in spite of all evidence to the contrary.⁴

Vatican II, in its Constitution on the Church, adopted a different approach. It taught that the church of Christ is a complex reality consisting of a human and a divine element (LG 8). It is both a hierarchically structured society and the mystical body of Christ, both a visible assembly and a spiritual community. Because the communion of grace is not exactly coextensive with the structured institution, the full reality of the church transcends human reckoning. But because the church is a sacrament, its outer form is a sign and bearer of the interior grace. In order for the church to function as a sacrament, the visible structure must point to the spiritual reality to which it is ordered. While Vatican II did not develop the apologetical use of the four attributes, it rejected any dichotomy between the visible structure and the spiritual communion.

Second, it should be observed that in the sentence quoted above, Vatican II attributes the four properties to the church of Christ, not directly to the Roman Catholic Church. Later in the same article, however, the Council goes on to say that the church of Christ, 'organized in the world as a society, subsists in the Catholic Church, governed by the successor of Peter and the bishops in communion with him'. The Council also remarks that many elements of sanctification and truth which properly belong to the church of Christ are to be found outside the structure of the Catholic Church. In other words, no claim is being made that the four attributes are exclusively proper to the Roman Catholic communion.

The claim that the church of Christ 'subsists' in the Roman Catholic communion has important implications for our subject. Assuming that the church of Christ is destined to endure to the end of time (as may be inferred from biblical texts such as [Matt. 16:18](#) and [Matt. 28:20](#)), and that it inalienably possesses these four properties, it follows that unity, holiness, catholicity and apostolicity must be abidingly present in the Catholic Church. If the Catholic Church were ever deprived of any of these gifts, which are affirmed in faith as properties of the church, the church of Christ could not be said to subsist in her. Catholics, without denying that unity, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity are verified in

³ 3. Hermann Josef Pottmeyer, 'Die Frage nach der wahren Kirche', in *Handbuch der Fundamentaltheologie* 3 (Freiburg: Herder, 1986), pp. 212–41.

⁴ 4. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology* 3 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1997), asserts that 'we have to apply the attributes of unity, holiness, apostolicity, and catholicity to a reality of the church that instead of confirming them is in plain contradiction with them' (409). In this context he refers to similar statements of Gerhard Ebeling in his *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens* 3 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1979), pp. 369–75

some measure in other communions, are convinced that each of these properties has been given to the Catholic Church as something she can never lose.⁵

This conclusion with regard to the four attributes in general will be confirmed when we review the Council's teaching on each of them in particular. We shall also have occasion to note that none of the four is perfectly present in the church at any time. So long as the church remains in its pilgrim state, the four properties are not only gifts to be gratefully received but, under another aspect, ideals to be prayerfully cherished and assiduously pursued. The church is charged to grow continually in unity, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity.

Nearly all the modern authors who have discussed these four properties make the further point that the four are inseparable and mutually coherent. The unity proper to the church of Christ is not any unity at all, but a unity that is holy, Catholic, and apostolic. Similarly, it may be said that the catholicity of the church is one, holy, and apostolic. And so likewise with each of the other attributes: no one of them can be explained without reference to the other three.

With these preliminaries it may now be possible to say something about how each of the properties in particular is understood in contemporary Catholic teaching. In discussing each property I shall indicate some biblical points of reference and then take up the interpretation of the same property in the documents of the Second Vatican Council.

THE CHURCH AS ONE

To bring people together into loving union with God and with one another was a central aim of the ministry of Jesus. He laid down his life for the sheep so that there might be 'one flock and one shepherd' ([John 10:16](#)). Jesus is described in the Fourth Gospel as having died 'to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad' ([John 11:52](#)). In his high-priestly prayer at the Last Supper Jesus implored that all who believed through the words of the apostles might be perfectly one, as he and the Father were one, 'so that the world may know that thou hast sent me and hast loved them even as thou hast loved me' ([John 17:23](#)).

Although the term 'one church' does not occur verbatim in Scripture, the idea is undoubtedly implied in the great biblical images of the People of God, the Body and Bride of Christ, and the Temple of the Holy Spirit. The term *ekklesia* is frequently used in the singular to designate the universal church. In describing Christ as head of the church, Paul indicates that the church as a whole is his body ([Eph. 1:22-23](#); [Col. 1:18](#)). He exhorts the Ephesians to be 'eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace', since there is but 'one body and one Spirit' ([Eph. 4:4](#)). All the members have been called to one hope, with 'one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father of us all' ([Eph. 4:5-6](#)).

In the letters of Paul the unity of the faithful is described as stemming principally from Christ, as head of the body ([Rom. 12:5](#)), and from the Holy Spirit, who distributes graces in the body that he animates in such a way as to build up the whole membership in unity ([1 Cor. 12:1-26](#); cf. [Eph. 4:12](#)). As a bond of unity, Paul frequently mentions the baptism whereby all have put on Christ ([Gal. 3:26-27](#); cf. [1 Cor. 10:1-4](#); [12:13](#)). He also speaks of

⁵ 5. As we shall note below, the Decree on Ecumenism states with regard to unity: 'This unity, we believe, dwells in the Catholic Church as something she can never lose, and we hope that it will continue to increase until the end of time' (UR 4). Consistently with its principles the Council could have said the same with regard to the other three attributes as well.

the Eucharist as a bond. Partaking of the one bread and the one cup, the communicants become really one in Christ ([1 Cor. 10:16-17](#)).

Christians must, however, live out in actual practice the unity that is already theirs in principle. Paul pleads with the Philippians to be one in mind, having the same love and living in full harmony ([Phil. 2:2](#)). Writing to the Corinthians, Paul is distressed that, having been baptized in the name of Christ, they adhere in a spirit of partisanship to human authorities such as Cephas, Apollos, and himself ([1 Cor. 1:10-13](#); [3:4](#)). Together with other apostles, Paul laboured strenuously to prevent the divergences between Jewish and Hellenistic Christianity from tearing the church apart.

The doctrine of Vatican II on the unity of the church is set forth most fully in the Decree on Ecumenism. It declares that Christ bestowed upon the church from the beginning the unity of full ecclesiastical communion, and then adds that 'we believe that it subsists in the Catholic Church as something she can never lose' (UR 4). Earlier, in its discussion of 'the sacred mystery of the unity of the Church', the Decree on Ecumenism teaches that the Holy Spirit, dwelling in individual believers and animating the church as a whole, brings the faithful into union with Christ. The Spirit, therefore, is 'the principle of the Church's unity' (UR 2). Baptism 'establishes a sacramental bond of unity among all who are reborn through it' (UR 22). The Eucharist is the sign and effective instrument of ecclesial unity (UR 2).

The church is described in the Constitution on the Church as a sacrament—that is to say, an efficacious sign and instrument—of communion with God and of the unity of the entire human race (LG 1). Its unity involves a fourfold bond: the profession of faith, the sacraments, ecclesiastical government, and communion (LG 14). Similar elements are mentioned in the Decree on Ecumenism, which affirms that Christ perfects the unity of his fellowship by governing it through the successors of the apostles under the direction of the Holy Spirit, so that all are maintained in the confession of a single faith, in the common celebration of divine worship, and in the fraternal concord of the family of God (UR 2). In the thinking of the Council Fathers the lived solidarity of the faithful, whereby the church is constituted as a communion of life, derives from, and depends upon, the three institutional elements: unity in professed faith, sacramental worship, and pastoral government.

The Catholic position regarding pastoral rule, since it differs from the usual Protestant position, may require some further elaboration. Christ is seen as having entrusted to the Twelve, with Peter at their head, the tasks of teaching, ruling, and sanctifying in order to preserve the church in unity throughout the world and to the end of time. These functions are perpetuated in subsequent generations by the bishops, with and under the pope as successor of Peter (LG 19, 20, and 22).

Vatican I in its Constitution on the Church declared that Christ the Lord set Peter over the rest of the apostles and instituted in him a permanent principle of unity in order that the episcopal office might be one and undivided and that, by the union of the priesthood, the whole multitude of believers might be held together in the unity of faith and communion (*Pastor aeternus*, Prologue, DS 3051). Vatican II, after reaffirming this doctrine (LG 18), declared that the Chair of Peter has the functions of protecting legitimate differences and seeing that they do not hinder unity but rather contribute to it (LG 23). The roles of the pope and bishops will have to be considered from another aspect under the rubric of apostolicity.

The unity of the church is that of a living, organic communion of individuals and of particular churches, all of which have their own identity. Every diocese, parish, and eucharistic assembly recapitulates, in some sort, the mystery of the universal church. In each local church, through the power of Christ, the 'one, holy, catholic and apostolic

Church is assembled' (LG 26). The particular churches of the Catholic communion are maintained in fellowship by their bishops, who are in hierarchical communion with one another and with the Holy See (LG 21–22). We shall speak further of the character of this communion as a variegated unity when we turn to the church's catholicity.

The unity of the church is far from perfect. Baptized Christians, though incorporated into Christ, are often divided in their ecclesiastical allegiance. Even within the Catholic Church, which has the fullness of the means of union, there are tensions and disagreements. The members do not always act as having 'one heart and one soul' ([Acts 4:32](#)).

The unity of Christ's Body extends in some measure beyond the Roman Catholic communion. All Christians who believe in Christ and are baptized in his name are already bound together by a certain imperfect communion and must therefore be recognized by Catholics as brothers and sisters in the Lord (UR 3). The ecumenical movement is intended to build upon, and increase, the partial communion that already exists with a view to overcoming all divisive differences and strengthening the church in the unity for which Christ prayed.⁶

THE CHURCH AS HOLY

In the same prayer in which he asked his Father to make his disciples one, Jesus besought the Father to make them holy. 'Sanctify them in the truth; thy word is truth ... And for their sake I sanctify myself, that they also may be consecrated in truth' ([John 17:17–19](#)).

Holiness, in biblical and Christian theology, consists in being delivered from sin and guilt, being set apart for God, and being united to him as the paragon and source of all holiness. Three aspects of the church's holiness may be distinguished.⁷ The church is holy, first of all, in its formal or constitutive elements: that is to say, the word of God, the sacraments, the hierarchical office, and the charismatic gifts that the Holy Spirit may be pleased to bestow. The church and its members are holy, in a second respect, by virtue of being consecrated or dedicated to God, as occurs, most fundamentally, in the sacrament of baptism. Thirdly, the church is holy in so far as its members, by personally responding to God's gifts, 'complete in their lives the holiness they have received' (LG 40). This personal sanctity, accomplished through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, consists in grace and supernatural virtues, such as faith, hope, and charity.

The New Testament offers innumerable texts identifying the church as a holy community. According to the Letter to the Ephesians Christ 'loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself in splendour, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish' ([Eph. 5:25–27](#)). The Letter to the Hebrews likewise teaches that Christ suffered 'in order to sanctify the people through his own blood' ([Heb. 13:12](#)).

The holiness of the church is powerfully brought out by the first Letter of Peter, which recalls the saying of God in [Leviticus 11:44–45](#), 'You shall be holy, for I am holy' ([1 Pet. 1:16](#)). This letter goes on to exhort Christians to be 'a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ' ([1 Pet. 2:5](#)).

⁶ 6. According to John Paul II, 'Ecumenism is directed precisely to making the partial communion existing between Christians grow towards full communion in truth and charity.' See his encyclical *Ut unum sint* (1995), §14.

⁷ 7. I borrow this threefold distinction from Francis A. Sullivan, *The Church We Believe In: One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic* (New York: Paulist, 1988), pp. 69–74.

Unlike those who stumble against Christ the cornerstone, Christians are ‘a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people’ ([1 Pet. 2:9](#)).

In the teaching of Vatican II holiness is designated as the supreme purpose of the church. According to the Constitution on the Liturgy everything in the life of the church is directed toward a twofold goal: the holiness of human beings and the glory of God in Christ (SC 10).

The holiness of the church, like its unity, is both a gift and a task. The Constitution on the Church, in its fifth chapter, declares that the indefectibility of the church’s holiness is a matter of faith (LG 39). The faithful have really been made holy by their baptism, but they must maintain and perfect that holiness by their way of life (LG 39–40). Earlier in the same Constitution, the holiness of the church and its members is attributed to the Holy Spirit, who dwells in the church and in the hearts of the faithful as in a temple (LG 4).

The church is most perfectly holy in Mary and the saints, who are intimately and abidingly united with God in heaven (LG 48). But already here on earth ‘the Church is adorned with true though imperfect holiness’ (LG 48), for in her the renewal of the world is realized in a preliminary way. ‘The Church, clasping sinners to her bosom, is at one and the same time holy and always in need of purification, as she unceasingly pursues the path of penance and renewal’ (LG 8).

The Council stops short of affirming in this text that the church is both holy and sinful, but some Catholic theologians would concede this. The church is entirely holy in its divinely given principles but sinful in its members who fail to measure up to the demands of their vocation. Saints and sinners, however, are related in different ways to the church. The saints exemplify what the church by its inherent nature tends to be and to accomplish, whereas sinners by the very fact of their sinfulness separate themselves in some degree from the church. By the sacrament of penance, sinners are reconciled both with God and with the church, which they have offended by their sin (LG 11).

Sin, therefore, cannot be attributed to the church when considered in its formal principles, but only when considered materially, in its guilty members. They exhibit not the true nature but rather the ‘un-nature’ of the church. Nevertheless it is true that, as Hans Küng has said, ‘In all its historical forms the true nature of the Church is accompanied, like a dark shadow by its “un-nature”; the two are inseparable.’⁸ The church as a visible society is tarnished by the sins of its members, including those of its pastors.

In comparison with Vatican I, which spoke of the church’s ‘inexhaustible fruitfulness in every kind of goodness’, Vatican II strikes a modest note in its claims for the sanctity of the Catholic people. According to the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, ‘It does not escape the Church how great a distance lies between the message she offers and the human weakness of those to whom the gospel is entrusted’ (GS 43). The false ideas and unworthy conduct of Christians ‘must often be said to conceal rather than to reveal the authentic face of Christ’ (GS 19).

The Decree on Ecumenism recognizes that ‘both sides were to blame’ in bringing about the present ruptures of communion (UR 3). The failure of Catholics to live up to their high calling has contributed to Christian divisions. Catholics are therefore obliged to forgive others and to beg pardon of God and of their separated brothers and sisters for their own sins against unity (UR 7). The Decree goes on to speak of ‘spiritual ecumenism’ as ‘the very soul of the whole ecumenical movement’ (UR 8). Christ, says the Decree, ‘summons the Church to continual reformation, of which it is always in need, insofar as it is an institution of human beings here on earth’ (UR 6).

⁸ 8. Hans Küng, *The Church* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday Image Books, 1976), p. 51.

While recognizing the harm inflicted on both sides by these divisions, the Council exhorts Catholics to esteem the truly Christian endowments that are to be found in other Christian churches and communities. 'It is right and salutary to recognize the riches of Christ and the virtuous deeds in the lives of others, who bear witness to Christ, even at times to the shedding of their blood' (UR 4). Holiness, therefore, is not exclusively proper to Catholic Christianity. It is not for us to set limits to what the Holy Spirit can bring about in individuals and communities that lack the full institutional means of holiness.

THE CHURCH AS CATHOLIC

The term 'catholic' is never applied to the church in Scripture, but it is frequently used by the Fathers beginning with Ignatius of Antioch. Etymologically, 'catholic' (*kath. holou*) has reference to the whole (*holos*) as opposed to the parts. In modern usage it commonly denotes wide expansiveness but not in the sense of merely abstract universality. Some of the richness of the term is captured by Henri de Lubac, who writes, in a pregnant sentence, ' "Catholic" suggests the idea of an organic whole, of a cohesion, of a firm synthesis, of a reality which is not scattered but, on the contrary, turned towards a center which assures its unity, whatever the expanse in area or the internal differentiation might be.'⁹ Catholicity, therefore, must be understood in light of the other three properties.

The church received from the risen Christ a mandate to teach and baptize all nations ([Matt. 28:20](#); cf. [Mark 16:15](#); [Luke 24:47](#); [Acts 1:8](#)). The universality of its diffusion was symbolized at Pentecost, when the Spirit came upon 'devout men from every nation under heaven', all of whom were able to hear the preaching of the apostles in their own languages ([Acts 2:4-6](#)). From that time forth the church has had a real though imperfect catholicity—a catholicity in principle that incessantly tends to achieve itself in historical actuality. The Revelation of John, in a vision of the redeemed in heaven, speaks of 'a great multitude which no man could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb' ([Rev. 7:9](#)). The blessed have been ransomed by the blood of the Lamb 'from every tribe and tongue and people and nation' ([Rev. 5:9](#)).

Paul throughout his correspondence makes much of the church's capacity to transcend the differences of social class, gender, language, and race by which human society is commonly torn. In Christ, he says, 'there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus' ([Gal. 3:28](#)). Christ in his crucified flesh has broken down the walls of division, reconciling all enemies by establishing a new dwelling place of God in the Spirit ([Eph. 2:11-22](#)). As is evident from texts such as these, the idea of catholicity, though not the term, is abundantly present in the New Testament.

Vatican II presents a compact treatise on catholicity in article 13 of the Constitution on the Church. The new people of God, it declares, 'while remaining one and unique, is to be spread throughout the whole world and through every age to fulfil the design of the will of God'. Later in the same article we read: 'This note of universality, which adorns the people of God, is a gift of the Lord himself by which the Catholic Church efficaciously and continually tends to recapitulate the whole of humanity with all its riches, under Christ the head, in the unity of his Spirit.' Catholicity, therefore, is both a gift and a task. The gift is conferred upon the whole people of God, but may be expected to be realized more

⁹ 9. Henri de Lubac, 'The Particular Churches in the Universal Church', in his *The Motherhood of the Church* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1982), pp. 173-74. I discuss this passage in my *The Catholicity of the Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, paperback, 1987, reprinted 1989 and 1996), p. 167.

conspicuously in the Catholic Church, which is equipped to overcome divisive barriers thanks to the fullness of the doctrinal, sacramental, and ministerial structures with which it has been gifted.

The Constitution on the Church at several points emphasizes that the unity of the church is not the same as uniformity. It is a pluriform unity in which particular churches enjoy their own proper traditions (LG 13). 'The variety of local churches, in harmony among themselves, demonstrates all the more resplendently the catholicity of the undivided Church' (LG 23).

The dynamic catholicity of the church is treated most explicitly in the Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity. Such activity, according to the Council, is intimately linked with the very nature of the church and with all four of its essential properties, but especially with catholicity: 'It spreads abroad the saving faith of the church and brings its catholic unity to perfection by expanding it' (AG 6). By evangelizing all nations the church realizes its own essence as a sign and instrument of universal salvation. It also contributes to the salvation and sanctification of those whom the church evangelizes. In its chapter on particular churches (AG 19–22) this decree speaks at some length of the regional customs and traditions by which each people is called to enrich the 'catholic unity' of the whole.

The ecumenical significance of this diversity is noted in the Decree on Ecumenism. 'The inheritance handed on by the apostles was received in different forms and ways, so that from the earliest times the church has had a varied development in different places, owing to diversities of natural gifts and conditions of life' (UR 14). Provided that unity in essentials is maintained, different theological, liturgical, canonical, and spiritual traditions can coexist within the church (UR 15–16).

Christians who are not in full communion with Rome are not for that reason destitute of the catholic unity that is an inalienable property of the church of Christ. To the extent that they remain authentically Christian in their faith, worship, and practice, these churches share in, and contribute to, the splendid diversity of the whole. But, as we are told in the Decree on Ecumenism, 'the divisions among Christians prevent the church from realizing in practice the fullness of catholicity proper to her, in those of her sons and daughters who, though attached to her by baptism, are yet separated from full communion with her. Furthermore, the church finds it more difficult to express in actual life her full catholicity in every respect' (UR 4). Churches separated from Rome have lost something of the fullness of the apostolic heritage of faith, sacraments, and ministry that would be available if they had retained the bonds of full ecclesiastical communion. The Catholic Church itself is prevented from benefiting as it might from the inculturated expressions of Christian faith in nations where other forms of Christianity are dominant. Ecumenism, by progressively overcoming the wounds of divisions, contributes to the palpable realization of the church's catholicity.

THE CHURCH AS APOSTOLIC

The fourth property of the church, apostolicity, has reference to continuity with the apostles who were the first witnesses of the faith and the first pastors of the church. The church, by reason of being apostolic, is not a mere movement that takes its rise from Christ, nor is it a society that reinvents and restructures itself at will. Its essential form and teaching have been given to it by Christ, who remains for all ages the one foundation that has been laid ([1 Cor. 3:11](#)). The apostles are associated with Christ as living instruments by which he imparts his saving grace and holy doctrine. The church, therefore, is 'built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone' ([Eph. 2:20](#)). The Revelation of John, consequently, can describe the

holy city Jerusalem (that is to say, the church in glory) as having twelve foundations, 'and on them the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb' ([Rev. 21:14](#)).

The apostolicity of the church, as understood in the Catholic tradition, consists in its fidelity to the apostolic deposit of faith, sacraments, mission, and ministry. The ministers who succeed to the apostles play an indispensable role. At the end of Matthew's Gospel Christ instructs the Eleven to teach and baptize all nations, promising to be with them always, to the close of the age ([Matt. 28:20](#)). This great commission, as interpreted by Vatican II, implies that Christ remains with the apostolic leadership throughout the centuries (LG 17; 19; AG 5). The apostolic tradition is regarded as a vital force that safeguards the identity of the deposit of faith while continually adapting its forms and styles of expression to new audiences and situations under the impulses of the Holy Spirit (DV 8).

As the church expanded and as the apostles and their first companions began to die off, measures were taken to ensure the perpetuation of the apostolic ministry. In the Acts and the Pastoral Letters, Paul and others are shown as laying on hands for the ministries of the episcopate, presbyterate, and diaconate (e.g., [Acts 6:6](#); [14:23](#); [1 Tim. 4:14](#); [2 Tim. 1:6](#); [5:22](#); [Tit. 1:5](#)). The practice of ordination as a means of transmitting ecclesiastical office in the apostolic succession is even more clearly attested by early church writers, such as 1 Clement, Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Hippolytus. The succession of bishops ordained by apostles and their authorized associates was of great importance in protecting the early church against the incursions of Gnosticism.

In so far as apostolicity conserves the integrity of the word of God, Vatican II treats of it in the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation. The gospel, says the Council, was entrusted by Christ to the apostles, who handed it on in the inspired writings of Holy Scripture and in the form of living tradition. The bishops ordained in the apostolic succession have been seen since ancient times as the authorized guardians of the apostolic deposit (DV 7–8).

The Constitution on the Church cites Irenaeus and other early Fathers as witnesses that the apostles appointed bishops to succeed them, so that the apostolic tradition might be made accessible to subsequent generations (LG 20). The bishops do not take the place of the apostles as founders of the church but perpetuate their functions as 'teachers of doctrine, priests of sacred worship, and ministers of government'. At this point Vatican II makes one of its most emphatic statements:

Just as the office that was given individually by the Lord to Peter, the first of the apostles, is permanent and meant to be handed on to his successors, so also the apostles' office of feeding the Church is a permanent one, to be carried on without interruption by the sacred order of bishops. Therefore the synod teaches that by divine institution the bishops have succeeded to the place of the apostles as shepherds of the Church. Whoever hears them hears Christ, but whoever rejects them rejects Christ and him who sent Christ (cf. [Luke 10:16](#)). [LG 20]

The Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops takes up many of the same points. It teaches that Christ entrusted the pastoral office to the apostles with and under Peter, and that the bishops, in union with the Roman pontiff, succeed to that responsibility (CD 2). Echoing Vatican I, Vatican II in its Constitution on the Church teaches that the ministry of Peter and his successors was established by Christ as the 'perpetual and visible principle and foundation of unity' (LG 23).

The Decree on Ecumenism nevertheless affirms that the separated Eastern churches, while lacking full communion with the apostolic See of Rome, possess 'by apostolic succession, the priesthood and the Eucharist' (UR 15). The 'ecclesial communities' of the West—a term presumably intended to include Protestant bodies—are judged not to

possess the authentic and full reality of the eucharistic mystery because of their lack of the sacrament of order (*propter sacramenti ordinis defectum*, UR 22).

Since Vatican II the topic of apostolic succession in the ministry has been extensively analysed in ecumenical dialogues between the Catholic Church and episcopally ordered churches, such as the Anglican and the Orthodox. The theme of presbyterial succession has been taken up in dialogues with some churches of Lutheran and Calvinist lineage.

Many of the fruits of these dialogues are gathered up in the Lima text on 'Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry', issued by the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches in 1982. Reflecting a broad ecumenical consensus, the chapter on Ministry affirms that apostolic succession in the ministry is to be valued as 'serving, symbolizing, and guarding the continuity of the apostolic faith and communion' (§36).¹⁰ Distinguishing between the apostolicity of the whole church and the apostolic succession in the ministry, the document treats the latter as subordinate to the former, which constitutes its goal and purpose. The succession of bishops is described as having become 'one of the ways, together with the transmission of the Gospel and the life of the community, in which the apostolic tradition of the Church was expressed' (ibid.) Even without the historic episcopate, says the text, 'a continuity in apostolic faith, worship, and mission' can be preserved in a variety of ways including, for example, the restriction of the power to ordain to 'persons in whom the Church recognizes the authority to transmit the ministerial commission' (§37). The Faith and Order Commission here encourages all churches to accept the episcopal succession as a sign of the apostolicity of the life of the whole church (§38).

Although the Catholic members of the Faith and Order Commission voted in favour of the Lima text, the Holy See, in its official review of the text, expressed some reservations about the handling of apostolic succession. The bishop, according to the critique, is not just a sign and servant of apostolic succession, but, in the Catholic understanding, the qualified spokesman in the communion of the churches. 'Through the episcopal succession, the bishop embodies and actualizes both catholicity in time, i.e., the continuity of the Church across the generations, as well as the communion lived in each generation.'¹¹ This criticism should not be interpreted as a rejection of the Lima text but rather as an indication that, like most ecumenical statements, it calls short of embodying the full Catholic doctrine. Evangelicals, of course, will criticize Lima from a very different perspective.¹²

The problem of apostolicity arises in sharpest form with regard to churches that make no claim to ministerial orders in succession to the apostles. Must the Catholic deny that such churches are devoid of apostolicity? The principles of the Lima text are helpful because they indicate that these churches may have a large measure of apostolicity without apostolic succession in the ministry. They may, for example, adhere staunchly to the apostolic Scriptures and to the doctrines and practices authorized by those Scriptures. The Apostles' Creed as a reading of the central biblical message, has authority for Evangelical as well as Catholic Christians. Evangelical theologians, like Catholics, are wary of any modernism that would let the structures, doctrine, and mission of the church be

¹⁰ 10. *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*. Faith and Order Paper 111 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982), quotation from page 29.

¹¹ 11. Vatican Appraisal of the WCC Document, 'Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry', *Origins* 17 (November 19, 1987): pp. 401–16, at 414.

¹² 12. See 'An Evangelical Response to *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*, a critique prepared by the World Evangelical Fellowship and edited by Paul G. Schrotenboer in [Evangelical Review of Theology](#) 13 (1989): pp. 291–313, esp. pp. 303–5, 307–8.

radically refashioned according to the whims and the preferences of the members. To insist on the sole lordship of Christ as known to us from the Scriptures is already to accept a large measure of apostolicity.

CONCLUSION

The unity of the church, which may be understood as the ultimate goal of the ecumenical movement, cannot be measured in a purely quantitative way, by counting the elements that the participating churches hold in common. Unity, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity are dynamic realities that depend on the foundational work of Christ and on his continued presence and activity through the Holy Spirit. Evangelical communities that excel in love for Jesus Christ and in obedience to the Holy Spirit may be more unitive, holy, catholic, and apostolic than highly sacramental and hierarchically organized churches in which faith and charity have become cold.

With respect to unity, there are grounds for the statement of Pope John XXIII, repeated by John Paul II, to the effect that 'what unites us is much greater than what divides us'.¹³ What could outweigh their faith in the triune God and in Jesus Christ the Lord? While still disagreeing on certain important points of doctrine and ecclesiastical order, they may have very fruitful contacts and stimulate one another to a closer following of Christ. By coming together in prayer, worship, dialogue, and service to the whole human family, they promote the unity, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity of the church.

Members of these communities can agree that all believing Christians are in some sense one and that they must strive to overcome their divisions, which are clearly against the will of Christ. As followers of the one Lord they are committed to strive for the unity for which he prayed. Partaking of one baptism and praying to the same Lord, they should aspire to unity in mind and heart, in will and action. There should be as little dissension among them as possible.

Evangelicals and Catholics can agree, moreover, that holiness is an essential mark of the Christian life as pursued by individual believers and by communities. It is not enough to confess Christ while refusing to do what he commands. Believers must be obedient to the Lord and docile to the Holy Spirit, manifesting in their conduct the holiness of the Church for which Christ sacrificed himself.

In the third place, all who call themselves 'Evangelical' or 'Catholic' should be able to share a universalistic faith. The gospel is unquestionably to be disseminated to all human beings, regardless of race, language, gender, and social status. All who accept that gospel have a bond of unity that transcends all ethnic and sociological divisions. The company of believers, as a worldwide fellowship, cannot fail to be in a true sense catholic.

It can be agreed, finally, that the church should remain forever faithful to its origins in Jesus Christ and in the apostles whom he sent into the world. The Scriptures of the New Testament are themselves apostolic and are a norm of the apostolicity that Catholics and Evangelicals seek to preserve.

Once these agreements are firmly in place, Evangelicals and Catholics can joyfully recognize each other as members of one Christian family, sharing in common their faith in the triune God and in Christ the Redeemer. With this realization they can approach the historically disputed points with greater hope of agreement. The full unity for which Christ prayed cannot be treated as an empty dream. Even though its realization surpasses human power, it lies within the capacity of the Holy Spirit, in whom Christians must finally place their trust.

¹³ 13. John Paul II, *Ut unum sint*, §20.

Ecclesiology in the Breach: Evangelical Soundings

George Vandervelde

Keywords: Dialogue, Church, Baptism, Ministry, Eucharist, Ecumenical

INTRODUCTION: ECCLESIOLOGICAL HURDLES

Writing a discussion paper on ecclesiology from an Evangelical perspective for a consultation with Roman Catholic theologians, one faces multiple hurdles. Though two of these are common to any ecclesiology, both are 'evangelically' compounded. The first is the dilemma inherent in the profession of the unity of the church in the face of its evident brokenness: in elaborating an ecclesiology one must write about *the* church, the *one* church¹—yet one can do so only from the perspective of a *partial segment* of the one church. The other problem that is common to all ecclesiological discussion is closely related to the dilemma of division, in fact, may be considered as an explication of this dilemma. Current ecumenical discussion has placed ecclesiology centre-stage: greater visible unity can be achieved only as basic ecclesiological differences are resolved. But especially those traditions with the most highly developed ecclesiologies are loath to relativize their ecclesiology as a *particular* ecclesiology, a unique, tradition-shaped window through which one views the *one church*. The 1950 Toronto statement, in fact, enshrines this problem within the heart of the ecumenical movement. After insisting that the World Council of Churches 'cannot and should not be based on any one particular conception of the church', the statement allows that membership in the Council 'does not imply that a church treats its own conception of the Church as merely relative', nor does it imply that each church must regard the other member churches as churches in the true and full sense of the word'.² While all traditions face the ecclesiological problem of the single and multiple, the one and broken church, this conundrum is compounded when examining ecclesiology from an evangelical perspective. This complication will become clear in examining the particular hurdles that lie in the way of elaborating an evangelical ecclesiological approach.

¹ 1. See Roger Haight, 'On Systematic Ecclesiology', *Toronto Journal of Theology* 8 (1992): 220–238; '... the object of ecclesiology must be the whole or universal church' (pp. 220–221). Already the Reformers were aware of the conundrum of the one-broken-church. Rolf Ahlers states that, in drafting the *Confessio Augustana*, 'Melancthon specifically avoided including a separate doctrine of the church lest it be mistaken for a doctrine of a separate church'; see Rolf Ahlers, 'The "Community of Brethren": The Contemporary Significance of the Third Thesis of Barnmen', *Calvin Theological Journal* 20 (1985): 7–31; citation from p. 9.

² 2. Michael Kinnamon and Brian E. Cope, eds., *The Ecumenical Movement: An Anthology of Key Texts and Voices* (Geneva: WCC, 1997), pp. 465, 467.

If there is one theological area in which evangelicalism is weak, it is ecclesiology.³ Many evangelical statements of faith lack an article on the church altogether, except for a reference to the spiritual unity of believers. Thus the 'Statement of Faith' of the National Association of Evangelicals (USA) affirms in its seventh and last article, 'We believe in the spiritual unity of believers in our Lord Jesus Christ'.⁴ While the World Evangelical Fellowship's 'Statement of Faith', by contrast, does refer to 'the Church' and 'the Body of Christ', such corporate language does not appear to go beyond the spiritual unity of individual believers that is mentioned in preceding apposite phrase: ['We believe in'] 'The Unity of the Spirit of all true believers, the Church, the Body of Christ'.⁵ It is not surprising therefore to observe that the World Evangelical Fellowship response to *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* states that the WEF Statement of Faith 'does not contain an article on the church'.⁶

Evangelical authors increasingly recognize ecclesiology as a serious weakness. Stanley Grenz calls the doctrine of the church 'the neglected stepchild of evangelical theology'.⁷ Donald Bloesch speaks of the 'appalling neglect of ecclesiology' in evangelicalism.⁸ In view of this deficiency, the WEF Theological Commission meeting in London in 1996, formulated some basic ecclesiological affirmations. In addition it recommended that the WEF 'undertake an intensive study . . . to consider revising the WEF Basis of Faith to produce a clearer statement on the church'. Further, the Commission recommended 'that the WEF institute a commission on evangelical ecclesiology to implement' the recommendations on ecclesiology.⁹

An additional hurdle in elaborating an evangelical perspective on ecclesiology lies in the diversity within evangelicalism regarding a basic ecclesiological building block, namely, baptism. While the majority of evangelicals practise 'believer's baptism', if baptism at all, a significant segment of those who are counted as evangelicals (e.g., Anglican and Reformed evangelicals) practise pedobaptism.¹⁰ Clearly, communions that

³ 3. Recent works by evangelical theologians are beginning to address this deficiency. See David Watson, *I Believe in the Church: The Revolutionary Potential of the Family of God* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1978); Bruce J. Nicholls, ed., *The Church: God's Agent for Change* (Exeter, UK: Paternoster, 1986; Edmund P. Clowney, *The Church* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1995); Everett Feguson, *The Church of Christ: A Biblical Theology for Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996). While directly challenging the Roman Catholic criticism regarding the ecclesiological deficit among evangelicals, Timothy George indirectly concedes that the criticism is not without ground; Timothy George, 'What I'd Like to Tell the Pope About the Church', (*Christianity Today*, June 15, 1998): 41–44.

⁴ 4. See Arthur H. Matthews, *Standing Up, Standing Together: The Emergence of the National Association of Evangelicals* (Carol Stream, IL: NAE, 1992), p. 55; or W. Harold Fuller, [People of the Mandate: The Story of the World Evangelical Fellowship](#) (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), p. 181.

⁵ 5. See David M. Howard, *The Dream that Would not Die: The Birth and Growth of the World Evangelical Fellowship, 1846–1986*. (Exeter: Paternoster, 1986), p. 31.

⁶ 6. Paul Schrottenboer, ed., 'An Evangelical Response to Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry', [Evangelical Review of Theology](#) 13 (1989): 291–313.

⁷ 7. Stanley J. Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the 21st Century* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1993), p. 165.

⁸ 8. Donald G. Bloesch, *The Future of Evangelical Christianity* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1983), p. 127.

⁹ 9. 'Faith and Hope for the Future: Towards a Vital and Coherent Evangelical Theology for the 21st Century. Summary Reports of the Working Groups', [Evangelical Review of Theology](#) 21 (1997): here citing pp. 21–22.

¹⁰ 10. In his 'Typology of Evangelicalism', Peter Toon, borrowing from a paper by Kevin Offner, lists twelve types, including 'Reformed', 'Anabaptist', 'Neo-orthodox', 'Charismatic', 'Fundamentalist', 'Social-action',

baptize infants are far more likely to emphasize the corporate nature of the body of Christ than communions that baptize only upon profession of faith. Without ignoring the important place of the pedobaptist evangelicals, I shall try to do justice to the more formidable challenge which the majority evangelical position presents to the present consultation.

Since an evangelical starting point provides, at best, a minimalist ecclesiology, and since the inclusion of infants in the Christian communion can not be assumed, the attempt to present 'evangelical ecclesiological soundings' appears to be an impossibility. Nevertheless, we embark on an evangelical voyage to chart routes through troubled ecclesiological waters believing that the separated communions cannot be isolated islands. Even amidst brokenness and splintering, there can be only one church to explore.

I have called this exploration 'ecclesiology in the breach'. This points to ecclesiology as both a problem and as a pointer to a solution. Ecclesiology is a problem in that it participates in the breach: ecclesiology is inevitably written from one side of brokenness. On the other hand, ecclesiology, rightly pursued, points to a solution: it intends the one church. One can speak ecclesologically only from within one part of a broken church but one must speak about the church that is in a real sense one. Ignoring one's locus in brokenness leads either to sectarian particularism or to imperialistic universalism. Both mutilate the catholicity of the one church.

In embarking on evangelical soundings, I shall focus initially on an existing dialogue document and on Catholic and Evangelical responses to an ecumenical document. In spite of the enormous breach between the evangelical and the Roman Catholic tradition, we are in the happy position of having the common statement entitled *The Evangelical-Roman Catholic Dialogue on Mission*,¹¹ and a commentary by both traditions on *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*.¹²

In the present discussion on 'church and mission' the key issues of the first consultation, justification by faith and the authority of Scripture,¹³ return with concentrated and existential force. Ecclesiology is not a new and disparate topic. It concerns an arena where the key dividing issues—if they are not abstract theological tenets—are played out. Jean Marie Tillard maintains that ' "justification by faith" is not the basic question. It is related to a more fundamental issue. The problem lies in the relation between Christ, Church and the Word of God'.¹⁴ Cited long before it was clear whether this consultation would continue, let alone what the topics of a future consultation might be, Tillard's analysis mentioned in my previous paper is even more pertinent for the present consultation:

What Tillard has in mind is the 'instrumental role' of the church in salvation. Once more we are very close to the issue of Scripture and Tradition. Tillard maintains that it is 'impossible to hear the Word of God without hearing it in the voice of the Church'. Though

and 'Liturgical-sacramental Evangelicalism' (in *The End of Liberal Theology: Contemporary Challenges to Evangelical Orthodoxy* [Wheaton, ILL: Crossway Books, 1995], pp. 213–215).

¹¹ 11. Basil Meeking and John Stott, eds., *The Evangelical-Roman Catholic Dialogue on Mission 1977–1984* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986). The document *Roman Catholicism: A Contemporary Evangelical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989) will also be consulted for additional comment.

¹² 12. For the Roman Catholic response, see Max Thurian, ed., *Churches Respond to BEM*, vol. 6 (Geneva: WCC, 1988), pp. 1–40; for the WEF response, see note 4 above.

¹³ 13. See [Evangelical Review of Theology](#) 21 (1997):100–153.

¹⁴ 14. J-M R. Tillard, 'We Are Different', *Midstream* 25 (1985): 281. Cited in my paper for the *Venice Consultation*, October 19

coming from God, the Word is revealed through a process in which the community itself, in the Old and the New Covenant, is profoundly involved and plays an important role. The 'basic divisive problem', according to Tillard, 'is the conception of the nature of the Church'.¹⁵

Ecclesiology, therefore, may be regarded as a study of the living matrix of the key issues of disagreement between distinct communions. More specifically, Tillard identifies the underlying issue, namely, the question concerning the role of the church in relation to salvation. The key issue interwoven with the major questions—justification by faith, Scripture and tradition, authority, sacraments, ministry—is indeed ecclesial mediation. We shall explore this as the ecclesial issue in the Roman Catholic—evangelical breach. To avoid repeating the discussions of the previous consultation, I shall not deal directly with the issue of justification nor with the specifics of the relation between Scripture and Tradition. Rather, I shall deal more broadly with the relationships between Word, Sacrament, Ministry, and Mission. I shall first present evangelical concerns regarding Roman Catholic understandings of ecclesial mediation. This critique will be presented not for its own sake but for in order to uncover the implicit evangelical ecclesial lineaments. This approach will inevitably uncover the breach. Subsequently, I will explore what may be required from both sides if the breach is to be at least navigable.

In the Breach: Ecclesial Mediation

We will start with the issue of sacraments. This issue concerns not merely the meaning and role of particular sacraments, but the meaning and role of the church itself. From the Roman Catholic point of view, the church as such is preeminently sacramental.¹⁶ The *Magna Carta* of the Second Vatican Council,¹⁷ the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* (*Lumen Gentium*), employs various images to depict the church, such as People of God, Body of Christ, Mystery, and Communion. Yet, the sacramental character of the church is foundational. *Lumen Gentium* introduces the church as fundamentally sacramental: 'By her relationship with Christ, the Church is a kind of sacrament or sign of intimate union with God'.¹⁸ Indeed the title of the first section, 'The Mystery of the church', is an allusion to the sacramental nature of the church. The sacramental character of the church is articulated by the notions 'sign' and 'instrument'. Although the entire existence and structure of the church is instrumental, the eucharist is the core instrument for salvation. 'As often as the sacrifice of the cross in which "Christ, our passover, has been sacrificed" ([1 Cor. 5:7](#)) is celebrated on the altar, the work of our redemption is carried on. At the same time, in the sacrament of the Eucharistic bread the unity of all believers who form one body in Christ (cf. [1 Cor. 10:17](#)) is both expressed and brought about' (*LG*, 3). Subsequent passages underscore the productive power of sacrament. Baptism is

¹⁵ 15. [Evangelical Review of Theology](#) 21 (1997):142–143.

¹⁶ 16. Especially for my understanding of the sacramental nature of the church in Roman Catholicism, I am indebted to the critique which Avery Dulles presented in Tantur of the previous version of this paper. His comments have led to refinements at various points. Although I do not labour under the illusion that these changes will meet all of his misgivings about my interpretation of Roman Catholic approaches to ecclesiology, I do hope that in its present version this paper more accurately pinpoints evangelical concerns.

¹⁷ 17. Albert C. Outler uses the term *Magna Carta* to describe *Lumen Gentium*, in Walter M. Abbott, *The Documents of Vatican II* (New York: The America Press, 1966), p. 105.

¹⁸ 18. *Lumen Gentium*, no. 1 (citations from Council documents are found in Walter M. Abbott, ed., *The Documents of Vatican II* (New York: Guild Press, 1966). In his introduction to the document, Avery Dulles calls *Lumen Gentium* the central and 'most imposing achievement of Vatican II' (*ibid.*, pp. 10, 13).

described as a ‘sacred rite’ in which ‘fellowship with Christ’s death and resurrection is symbolized and is brought about’, and in the eucharist ‘we are made members of his body (cf. [1 Cor. 12, 27](#)) ... (LG, 7). The foundational role of the sacraments is confirmed when *Lumen Gentium* teaches that the sacraments generate the vital dynamic of the church: ‘It is through the sacraments that the sacred nature and organic structure of the priestly community is brought into operation’ (LG, 11).¹⁹ Later we shall consider the implications of the link between the sacraments and the ‘sacred nature and organic structure’ of the ordained ministry.

We are now in a position to consider a contrasting, evangelical approach to church, sacraments, and salvation. Lacking an evangelical counterpart to a Vatican Council, we shall delineate an evangelical approach by drawing primarily on the WEF response to *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* and, to a lesser extent, on the WEF response to the Apostolic Faith study. These responses are the closest available approximations to an ‘official’ evangelical position on ecclesiology. The evangelical response, in turn, will be compared to the ecclesiological dimensions of the Roman Catholic response to *BEM*. Our concern here is not the proper interpretation of a document of the World Council of Churches. Rather, for the purposes of this consultation, *BEM* will function as buffer and bridge—or perhaps simply as a common sounding board.

EVANGELICAL CONCERN: SACRAMENTALISM

The evangelical critique of *BEM* focuses primarily on two issues: the role of Scripture and ‘sacramentalism’. We shall return to the issue of the Word and the church later. At this point, we shall concentrate on the ecclesiological implications of the evangelical critique of ‘sacramentalism’. The first critical point which the WEF Response raises with respect to the *BEM* is its ‘sacramental language’ (296).²⁰ The Response then points to frequent formulations that suggest a causal role of baptism with respect to salvation. The Response considers the problem of ‘sacramentalism’ of such importance that it devotes an appendix to this topic. There, it defines sacramentalism as the view that ‘sacraments are efficacious signs, conveying the grace that they contain’, i.e., ‘by virtue of the rite’ (312). The rejection of sacramentalism is the steady undertone of the evangelical critique of each major section of *BEM*.

While recognizing that *BEM* does place some stress on the need for conversion and faith, the Response insists that the notion that baptism ‘signifies and effects’ salvation ‘implies a sacramentalist causation that few evangelicals could support ...’ (297). As becomes clear later, the Response’s concern is that in *BEM* ‘signify’ connotes more than a symbolic efficacy by attributing a grace-conveying role to ‘the operation of the rite itself’ (297). Similarly the evangelical Response finds the Eucharist section of *BEM* deficient because of its ‘sacramentalist view, as distinguished from an evangelical one’ (300). The

¹⁹ 19. Accordingly, Miroslav Volf concludes that ‘Catholic ecclesiology [as represented by Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger] understands the church as constituted in the Spirit through the sacraments, above all through baptism and the Eucharist, and through the word’. The reference to the instrumentality of ‘the word’ suggests that it is on the same level as the sacraments, which in itself would distinguish a Roman Catholic from an evangelical approach. There is a further point of difference, however; as Volf points out ‘the office of bishop represents the indispensable condition’ both of the sacraments and of the word. As Volf explains, ‘the sign and guarantor of the universal significance and divine origin of the sacraments and the word’ is the bishop in apostolic succession. Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), p. 130

²⁰ 20. The parenthetical numbers in this section refer to the page numbers of [The Evangelical Review of Theology](#) 13 (1989); see note 6 above.

Response questions *BEM*'s accentuation of the efficacious communication of grace and the actualization of the sacrifice on the cross by way of the eucharist (301). The WEF Response concludes its consideration of the *BEM* section on the eucharist by deriving an ecclesiological statement from a soteriological thesis:

These biblical considerations on the Lord's Supper must be seen in the context of the evangelical understanding of the gospel. It is centred in Christ's redeeming work on the cross where he died for our sin as our righteous Substitute. On the basis of this work of Christ the Christian church lives, not as an institution that dispenses salvation, but as a community of those who have been justified by grace and who proclaim salvation (303)

As mentioned, whether this critique of *BEM* is warranted is, for the purposes of this paper, irrelevant. The critique is important only for what it reveals about evangelical ecclesiological motifs, especially when compared to the ecclesiological assumptions of the Roman Catholic Response to *BEM*. Before considering the Vatican Response, we must briefly consider the Evangelical response to 'Ministry' in *BEM*.

Interestingly, the Response expresses its critique of the ministry section only indirectly as a concern about ecclesial mediation. After describing the evangelical tradition as being characterized by a rather flexible and functional approach to 'the officially appointed ministry', the evangelical Response joins a chorus of lamentations prompted by the ministry section.²¹ The WEF Response decries the fact that, in its elaboration of official ministry, *BEM* 'largely fails to capitalize on the excellent foundation laid in M 1-6', i.e., the introductory section entitled 'The Calling of the Whole People of God' (305).

The Response suggests in effect that by considering ordained ministry 'constitutive for the life and witness of the church' *BEM* gives it a role and status that belongs solely to the resurrected Christ who by his Spirit is present in the believing community. Yet, the WEF Response does not artificially play official ministry off against that of Christ. The ordained ministry may properly be said to represent Christ to the community, 'as long as it is clear that they represent Christ in a way that is not *essentially* different from the way in which any believer is called and gifted to represent Christ' (306). Accordingly, the Response rejects the notion of a ministerial priesthood, which has a priestly status that is distinct from the priestly status of *all* believers. Similarly, it rejects the idea that by the rite of ordination 'the authority of Jesus Christ is conferred on the minister' (306). The consistent criticism of sacramentalism returns when the Response claims that such conferral of Christ's authority becomes even more problematic when linked to a sacramental notion of ordination (306, 308).

ROMAN CATHOLIC CONCERN: RELATIVIZING THE (ROMAN CATHOLIC) CHURCH

Turning to the Roman Catholic Response to *BEM*,²² the danger looms of the breach between the evangelical and the Roman Catholic tradition widening to an unbridgeable chasm. For, as we shall see, the Roman Catholic Response frequently goes in a direction

²¹ 21. For a summary of the barrage of criticism levelled at the ministry section, see *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry: Report on the Process and Responses, 1982-1990* (Geneva: WCC, 1990), pp. 74-88.

²² 22. In Max Thurian, *Churches Respond to BEM*, vol. 6 (Geneva: WCC, 1988), pp. 1-40.

diametrically opposite to the WEF Response. Nevertheless, the risk of exaggerating the differences is worth taking in order to crystallize the nature of the breach.²³

The Vatican Response to *BEM* is especially fascinating for the purposes of a consultation on ecclesiology. Resounding through the entire Vatican document is the criticism that *BEM* lacks an ecclesiological framework (5).²⁴ Accordingly, the Response frequently laments the fact that *BEM* fails to elaborate the ecclesiological dimension of particular issues. When it summarizes the key issues in need of ecclesiological attention, the overlap with the concerns expressed in the WEF Response is striking. The Roman Catholic response identifies as key issues, ‘the notion of sacrament (and sacramentality), the precise nature of the apostolic tradition, and the issue of decisive authority in the church’ (6).

In its assessment of the *BEM* section on baptism, a key Roman Catholic criticism indicates the way in which its ecclesiological approach diverges from that evident in the WEF Response. The Vatican response takes issue with *BEM*’s appeal to common baptism as constituting a ‘basic bond of unity’, testifying to our being ‘one people’, ‘one holy, catholic, apostolic church’. The Response does not dispute any of these affirmations, of course, but faults *BEM* for not giving ‘adequate attention ... to the implications of the fact that a person is baptized within a particular ecclesial fellowship in a divided Christianity’ (11). Here a very concrete church-consciousness prompts the Roman Catholic Response to insist on keeping in view the *visible* church and its disunity.

A rather different church-consciousness becomes evident in the evangelical Response, when it takes exception to the *BEM* appeal to baptism—for quite opposite reasons. It insists that ‘to base unity on the rite of baptism is entirely foreign to Scripture, since [1 Cor. 12:13](#) does not refer to water-baptism. Biblical unity is based on union with Christ through the Spirit’s indwelling ([Rom. 8](#))’.²⁵ Here we catch a glimpse of the difference in ecclesiological orientation. In the citation from the WEF Response, the term ‘rite’ is key. It calls attention to the evangelical wariness of interposing an institution between Christ and salvation, in this case between Christ and the unity of the community of the saved. The unity of the body is rooted in Christ and is manifested in the believing response to him. To the extent that baptism plays a role in the unity of the church, it does so as a secondary and symbolic testimony to the ‘spiritual unity’ of all believers. In its own way, the Evangelical approach takes into account the visible church and its disunity but insists that what is visible to the eye is relativized by something deeper. Behind visible unity lies the spiritual, and hence invisible, unity of all true believers.

Turning to the Roman Catholic assessment of *BEM*’s elaboration of the Eucharist, the comments on real presence and on sacrifice are especially striking. While appreciating *BEM*’s affirmation of the ‘real presence’ of Christ, the Catholic Response insists that this ‘intrinsic change’ can be maintained only by affirming the ‘conversion of the elements’ into the body and blood of Christ. Furthermore, this tenet is posited not merely as an explanatory theory but is declared to be ‘a matter of faith’, in fact, ‘a central mystery of faith’ (22). Accordingly, when in a commentary, *BEM* takes into account ‘some who consider it necessary to assert a change of the elements’, the Vatican Response takes

²³ 23. In spite of the fact that the Roman Catholic Response to *BEM* is twice the length of the evangelical counterpart, I shall cite the Vatican document highly selectively. The focus will be on those features of the Roman Catholic Response that relate directly to the ecclesiological motifs evident in the WEF Response.

²⁴ 24. In this section the numbers in parentheses refer to the page numbers of Max Thurian, *Churches Respond to BEM*, vol. 6 (see previous note).

²⁵ 25. *WEF Response*, p. 298.

exception: ‘The phrase “consider it necessary to *assert*” is not adequate to express’ the Catholic position. ‘*Consider it necessary to confess* would be more appropriate’ (23, n. 9). Clearly this Response resists any attempt to relativize the Roman Catholic position and, instead, calls for further work on this issue ‘from the perspective of the Catholic faith’ (23).

The other major point at which the Roman Catholic Response takes issue with *BEM* concerns the understanding of the eucharist as ‘sacrifice’. The Vatican Response appreciates *BEM*’s affirmation that the sacrifice on the cross is salvifically represented in the sacrifice of the eucharist (19). The Response, nonetheless, considers the linkage posited in *BEM* to be much too weak. *BEM* locates the sacrificial nature of the eucharist in the inclusion of the church in Christ’s *intercession*. This focuses on the priestly role of the *exalted* Christ. The Vatican response considers this to be inadequate because it does not focus on the eucharistic presence of the *crucified* Christ. The unique sacrifice of the cross can indeed not be repeated. ‘But since the high priest is the crucified and risen Lord, his offering of self on the cross can be said to be “made eternal”. His glorified body is the body of the Lord offered once-for-all’ (20).

Interestingly, the evangelical response rightly anticipated that the way in which *BEM* construes the link between the eucharist and sacrifice ‘is satisfactory neither to traditional Roman Catholics nor to evangelicals’.²⁶ The evangelical document argues that in the Scriptures the notion of ‘eucharist’ as the sacrifice of praise ‘refers to the accompanying prayer, not to the meal itself’ (303). Moreover, it takes issue with a shift in focus from the Lord’s gift to us in his supper to a focus on ‘what we offer to God’ (301). At the same time, while emphasizing the direction from God to us, the WEF Response is wary of linking this gift in any ‘causal’ way to the ‘rite’ of the eucharist (302). The gift character of the eucharist is centred in the ‘promise of the gospel in the sacrament as “visible word”—a gift that is unpacked and received only by faith’ (302). At almost every point, then, where the evangelical Response finds *BEM* explication of the sacraments to be too strong, the Roman Catholic Response finds *BEM* to be too weak.

The ecclesiological dimensions of the divergences between the Roman Catholic and the evangelical critique of *BEM*’s understanding of the sacraments becomes evident in the Roman Catholic response to *BEM*’s section on ministry. The Roman Catholic concern centres on the sacramental nature of the priestly state and its role. The Vatican response acknowledges that *BEM* is open to a sacramental understanding of ordination but openness is not enough. This concern represents not merely ‘ministry’ as a distinct function within the church. For the Roman Catholic Response, ministry is a prime crystallization point of the nature of ‘church’. The ‘sacramental aspect of the whole church’ is ‘at work in a particular way in the ministry, in its teaching office, in the administration of the sacraments and in its governing’. The Response clarifies what it means by the sacramental aspect of the church when it states that the church is ‘in a real and effective sense’ an ‘icon of the presence of God and his kingdom in the world’. Interestingly it grounds this understanding ‘evangelically’, i.e., in God’s actual and constant faithfulness to his *promise* in Jesus Christ’ (26, emphasis added). But this promise is embodied and secured, so to speak, in the sacraments and in their ministers, the priests.²⁷ The Vatican Response maintains that we ‘see something of Christ’s real and sacramental presence in the ordained minister: a particular sign among others’ (29). The Response explains that ‘through its relation to the Archetypos Christ, the ordained ministry is in and for the church an effective and sacramental reality, by which a minister

²⁶ 26. [ERT](#) 13 (1989): 301.

²⁷ 27. This ministerial-sacramental guarantee is anchored in episcopal succession; see note 17 above.

acts “in persona Christi” (29). Consequently, the Roman Catholic response maintains that the reality of sacrifice does not lie only at the core of the eucharist but also ‘belongs inherently to the concept of ordained priesthood’ (30). Accordingly, the Response considers the title ‘priest’ appropriate to designate a specific ordained ministry, even though the New Testament uses the term only for the whole people of God. In this context, the Response reiterates the insistence of Vatican II that the priesthood of the faithful and the hierarchical priesthood differ from each other not merely in degree but in essence (30).²⁸

The ecumenical repercussions of this approach to ministry are momentous, for the Vatican insists not only on its understanding of ministry but calls into question the validity of all ordained ministries that are not somehow incorporated in the line of episcopal succession: ‘ordained ministry requires sacramental ordination by a bishop standing in the apostolic succession’ (36). If any doubt remains regarding the rigidity of this requirement, it is removed by this statement: ‘In regard to recognition of ministry, for us it is not only *agreement* on the question of apostolic succession, but also *being situated within it* that is necessary for recognition of ordination’ (38–39, emphasis added).²⁹

From the vantage point of evangelicalism a deep and wide ecclesiological chasm yawns here. The breach concerns ecclesiology, not merely as an understanding of the church but as the concrete configuration of the church. At issue is the nature of the church. Is the church primarily an institution which, through sacramental rites, administered by a sacramentally constituted priesthood, mediates the grace promised in the gospel, or is the church the gathering of believers whose faith is summoned and sustained by the promises of the gospel communicated by ordained ministers as well as others and signified in sacramental events? It is highly significant that substantially the same terms occur on both sides of this either/or formulation. Nevertheless, the terms are configured so differently as to describe two decidedly different ecclesiological approaches. Given this ecclesiological gap between evangelicals and the Roman Catholic Church, the question arises of course, whether the most that consultation and dialogue can accomplish is a sympathetic understanding of the significant differences? Although the importance of greater understanding should not be underestimated, one always hopes for more. Driven by such hope, I wish to introduce some Roman Catholic and evangelical voices that call for revisioning some of the points at issue.

ACROSS THE BREACH: CONVERSION OF CHURCHES?

It is impossible to review the creative revisioning that occurs within Roman Catholic theology on a broad range of issues. A sampling of the reexamination of a few neuralgic points must suffice. I have argued that the key difference between evangelical and Roman Catholic approaches to the church concerns its role in the communication of grace. Since this issue crystallizes in the understanding of official ministry, I shall examine more closely the understanding of the relation between the ordained ministry and the ministry of all. In order to demonstrate the perennial nature of the issue, I have selected one of the more creative revisionings of ecclesiology. As is evident in the title of his book on ecclesiology, Christian Duquoc’s stress on the provisional character of the church is an obvious choice. If even in a progressive, revisionist approach to ecclesiology the

²⁸ 28. See *Lumen Gentium*, 10.

²⁹ 29. Cf. the Vatican II Decree on Ecumenism, 22: ‘The ecclesial Communities separated from us lack that fullness of unity with us which should flow from baptism, and we believe that especially because of the lack of the sacrament of orders they have not preserved the genuine and total reality of the eucharistic mystery’.

foundational nature of the sacrament is evident, it is plausible to assume that we are on the track of a defining distinctive of Roman Catholic ecclesiology.³⁰

Duquoc construes the church as an institution that participates in a special 'symbolic order' which links the everyday world to the Kingdom of God. The three prime structures of this order are the sacrament, authority, and the Word. Though juxtapositioned, the three terms are not coordinate. The sacrament is clearly foundational: 'The sacramental structure of the church involves everyday life in a symbolic network'³¹ and 'provides the structural foundation for the functioning' of authority and the Word (104). Duquoc maintains that it is the sacrament that lifts the church above the level of a purely functional organization. Without the sacrament the church as organization would be a purely human institution, one that is shaped by the sociological function it is intended to serve.³² Since the ecclesial organization serves a transcendental reality, this reality of 'another world', the kingdom of God is determinative for the way the church is organized.³³ Duquoc describes the shape of the church as a 'hierarchical sacramental system'.³⁴ This system relates directly to the role which the church plays in communicating grace. 'The sacrament introduces an encounter in the society of the church between those who exercise authority in the place of Christ as a result of ordination and those who have not been given this representative function'.³⁵ Accordingly, Duquoc states that the sacrament 'inaugurates the church, legitimates its authority and opens up the way to discourse with the Other ...'³⁶

Speaking of the eucharist, Duquoc underscores the hierarchical nature of ecclesial mediation that is entailed in the requirement that the sacred meal be presided over by an ordained priest, within the context of episcopacy. Duquoc contrasts the Protestant and Catholic approaches to the eucharist. The Protestant tradition focuses on the brotherly and sisterly reality of a shared meal and thus mutuality. By contrast, 'the Catholic church stresses the hierarchical symbolism which shifts the centre of gravity of the meal towards the sacrificial anamnesis'. The Catholic church of course also affirms the 'democratic' nature of the meal, but, according to Duquoc this stands in contradiction to the hierarchical system. It is the hierarchical structure that determines the social organization of the church.³⁷ Later he characterizes the Protestant criticism of this structure in a way that holds preeminently for evangelical criticism of Roman Catholic ecclesiology: 'authority based on the sacrament favours an indisputable hierarchy and this then appropriates to itself the Word of God of which it should be the servant'.³⁸

Occurring in a work that relentlessly stresses the 'provisional' nature of the empirical church and painstakingly guards against all inflated notions of the church, Duquoc's depiction of hierarchical sacramental mediation is all the more significant in delineating

³⁰ 30. Christian Duquoc, *Provisional Churches: An Essay in Ecumenical Ecclesiology* (London: SCM, 1986).

³¹ 31. *Ibid.*, p. 98.

³² 32. *Ibid.*, pp. 96–99.

³³ 33. *Ibid.*, p. 98.

³⁴ 34. *Ibid.*, p. 99.

³⁵ 35. *Ibid.*

³⁶ 36. *Ibid.*, p. 105.

³⁷ 37. *Ibid.*, p. 100.

³⁸ 38. *Ibid.*, p. 103.

the gap between Catholic and Protestant ecclesiology— and *a fortiori* between Catholic and evangelical ecclesiology.

Nevertheless, to suggest that the divergence lies in the Roman Catholic tradition affirming and the evangelical tradition denying the mediating function of the church is to indulge in oversimplification. The gospel does not fall from heaven as a direct message, targeting isolated individuals. ‘How can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?’ Roger Haight’s comparison of Roman Catholic and Protestant piety applies to evangelicalism as well. He contrasts them as contrasting forms of mediation, and even then, he speaks, not of an absolute, but a relative difference: ‘Generally speaking, one finds a marked difference in Catholic and Protestant piety—the former being mediated more through the sacraments, and the latter through scripture as the Word of God’.³⁹ One could marshal sophisticated theological analyses and argumentation in an attempt to prove that God’s grace is always mediated. But even sociological and linguistic dynamics point to the ubiquity of mediation. Descriptions of, for example, ‘conversion’ do not employ a universal language nor are such descriptions derived exclusively from Scripture.⁴⁰ Rather, these descriptions bear all the marks of the particular tradition and the particular community within which a conversion takes place. Although this particular, learned language in no way detracts from the authenticity of the conversion, the fact that such formulations are typical of a particular group points to the mediational role of the community. *As Luther put it, ‘Those who are to find Christ must first find the church. ...’*⁴¹ The question that remains is whether the difference between Roman Catholic and Evangelical mediation lies only in the ‘means’ or whether the nature of mediation is decidedly different depending on whether the principal medium is the sacrament or the word.

With the word as primal medium of salvation the over-against nature of the gospel is more readily safeguarded, for the word is primarily news, an address, an appeal that confronts and claims the hearer— beginning with the proclaimer. The sacraments by contrast immediately conjure up the image of the ‘celebrant’, ‘presider’, one who officially represents the church in these sacramental acts. To be sure, such sacramental agency is not for a moment to be divorced from, let alone placed in opposition to the word that comes from beyond the church and is addressed to the church. Nevertheless, when mediation is thought of primarily as sacramental, the word is construed as being already embedded in the sacramental action. Though seemingly subtle, this shift in focus is crucial. In the international Lutheran—Roman Catholic dialogue on ‘The Church and Justification’, the issue of the church as sacrament and the understanding of mediation is singled out for critical comment. While acknowledging that the church is a ‘mediator of word and sacrament’ and thus ‘the instrument through which the Holy Spirit sanctifies’, the Lutheran approach stresses the fact that the church is first of all the ‘recipient’ of salvation and that it is Christ alone who has gained and bestows salvation on believers through word and sacrament. ‘Only as recipient’ does the church ‘mediate salvation’.⁴²

³⁹ 39. Roger Haight, *Toronto Journal of Theology* 8 (1992): 226.

⁴⁰ 40. Even the choice of Scripture passages that are woven into a conversion story are co-determined by the tradition of one’s faith community; see the papers of the previous consultation.

⁴¹ 41. Cited in Lutheran-Roman Catholic Joint Commission, *Church and Justification* (Lutheran World Federation, 1994), par. 111.

⁴² 42. Lutheran—Roman Catholic Joint Commission, *Church and Justification: Understanding the Church in the Light of the Doctrine of Justification*, (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 1994), par. 127, 128. Cf. the

In his study of ecclesiology, Duquoc, as we have seen, closely links the supremacy of the sacrament to the presence of the clergy as a special order, elevated in its mediating role and status above the people of God as a whole. Such sacerdotalism appears to be inherent in a sacramentally oriented church. This is evidenced by the insistence of Vatican II that the ordained priest differs *essentially*, not merely in degree, from the common priesthood. David Coffey's strenuous efforts to anchor the ordained priesthood within the common priesthood represent an attempt to counteract the tendency even of Vatican II to suggest that, in comparison to the common priesthood of God's people, the ordained priest has a privileged link to Christ.⁴³ On this issue, evangelicalism stands firmly in the Reformation tradition which rejected the notion that the priest or pastor acts '*in persona Christi*'.⁴⁴ The problem lies not in the representation of Christ as such, of course. We are restored in the image of God in Christ. Consequently, all God's people are gifted and called to act *in persona Christi*. From an evangelical perspective, the notion of acting *in persona Christi* becomes problematic only when it is construed as referring exclusively or preeminently to the status and role of those who have been sacramentally ordained.⁴⁵

The divergent views of the nature of ministry constitute a crystallization point of divergent ecclesiologies. From the Roman Catholic point of view, the rejection of the notion of sacramental ordination cannot but appear as a levelling strategy, one that eliminates the unique status of the church as 'body of Christ' and thus as a more-than-human reality. Rejecting the 'divine' dimension of the church that is reflected in the unique status of priests appears to denature the church. This 'anti-sacramentalist' approach appears to reduce the church to a sociological entity and its ministry to a functional arrangement.

This legitimate Roman Catholic fear is difficult to dispel, for it arises from within an ecclesiological paradigm with its own criterion of what qualifies as 'divine' within the church. An approach, such as that of evangelicals, which does not anchor the 'divinity' of the church ontologically in a sacramental structure is judged to derogate from the church's unique status as 'body of Christ', 'temple of the Holy Spirit', 'people of God'. Yet such derogation—widespread as it may be in Protestant theology—is inevitable only if one assumes that the sole way to secure the 'divine' status of the church is to accept a sacramental approach to the church. From an evangelical vantage point, the problem of communicating across divergent paradigms lies precisely in approaching the church in terms of 'divine' and 'human' dimensions, elements, or aspects. Often the implicit or explicit analogy that is operative in such language is that of the incarnation. Moreover, the

language of *Lumen Gentium*, 10, where the priest is presented as the primary actor and agent, while the people join this action in a receptive mode.

⁴³ 43. David Coffey, 'The Common and the Ordained Priesthood', *Theological Studies* 58 (1997): 209–236.

⁴⁴ 44. See Reinhard Messner, 'Rechtfertigung und Vergöttlichung und die Kirche', *Zeitschrift für Kirche und Theologie* 118 (1996): 23–35, esp. p. 33.

⁴⁵ 45. See the key passage in *Lumen Gentium*, no. 10: 'Though they differ from one another in essence and not only in degree, the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood are nonetheless interrelated. Each of them in its own special way is a participation in the one priesthood of Christ. The ministerial priest, by the sacred power he enjoys, molds and rules the priestly people. Acting in the person of Christ, he brings about the Eucharistic Sacrifice, and offers it to God in the name of all the people. For their part, the faithful join in the offering of the Eucharist by virtue of their royal priesthood. They likewise exercise that priesthood by receiving the sacraments, by prayer and thanksgiving, by the witness of a holy life, and by self-denial and active charity'. The priests have a 'sacred power' to form and rule the people of God; and by this sacred power 'the priest brings about' the sacrifice that only the priests offer to God, though in the name of the people. Although the people join in the sacrifice, it is in a derived, 'receptive' mode.

incarnation does not function as a general analogue that has as its reference the Johannean description of the Word having become flesh and pitching his tent among us. Rather, the incarnation functions as framework for ecclesiology in a very specific theological sense. The frame of reference is, often implicitly, the Chalcedonian doctrine of the two natures of Christ. The Chalcedonian construction is intimated in the opening paragraphs of Vatican II's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church: 'By her relationship with Christ, the Church is a kind of sacrament or sign of intimate union with God ...' (LG 1). The two-nature-in-one-person analogy becomes explicit in a subsequent description:

Christ, the one Mediator, established and ceaselessly sustains here on earth His holy Church ... as a visible structure. ... But the society furnished with hierarchical agencies and the Mystical Body of Christ are not to be considered as two realities, nor are the visible assembly and the spiritual community, nor the earthly Church and the Church enriched with heavenly things. Rather they form one interlocked reality which is comprised of a divine and a human element [*unam realitatem complexam* efformant, quae humano et divino coalescit elemento]. For this reason, by an excellent analogy, this reality is compared to the mystery of the incarnate Word. Just as the assumed nature inseparably united to the divine Word serves Him as a living instrument of salvation, so, in a similar way, does the communal structure of the Church serve Christ's Spirit, who vivifies it by way of building up the body (cf. [Eph. 4:16](#)). (LG 8.)

As is evident here, 'Mystery', the operative term in the title of the first major section of *Lumen Gentium*, functions as a synecdoche for the church as sacramental divine-human reality. The ecclesial reality is construed *per analogiam* within the framework of the christological two-natures-one-person doctrine.⁴⁶

The use of the christological analogy for the church tends to embed within the heart of ecclesiology the problem which Christian Duquoc identifies⁴⁷ and David Coffey attempts to rectify,⁴⁸ namely, the two-tier church.⁴⁹ The Chalcedonian paradigm tends to identify the sacramentally ordained ministry as the privileged ontological anchorage for the 'divine' element. Accordingly, the authoritative 'Prefatory Note' to *Lumen Gentium* speaks of the 'sacramental-ontological office', which finds its highest communal expression in the office of bishop, consecration to which gives 'an ontological participation in sacred functions . . .',⁵⁰ and endowment with 'sacred power'.⁵¹ As to priests, in the passage that stresses the essential difference of the ordained priest, it specifies his 'sacred power' as follows: 'The ministerial priest, by the sacred power he enjoys, *molds and rules* the priestly people. Acting in the person of Christ, he *brings about* the Eucharistic sacrifice, and *offers it to God*, in the name of all the people'; the priestly

⁴⁶ 46. The same Chalcedonian analogy plays a decisive role in the Encyclical on which *Lumen Gentium* depends, namely, *Mystici Corporis Christi* (1943); see nos. 59–67, esp. no. 63.

⁴⁷ 47. See pp. 15–17 above.

⁴⁸ 48. See note 25 above.

⁴⁹ 49. The two-tiered approach to the church appears to be inextricably related to a sacramental understanding of the church. Thus, while it is erroneous to suggest that in Roman Catholic ecclesiology the divine element is attributed to the hierarchical-institutional structures in a general (let alone, exclusive) way, it appears difficult to deny that the divine element is attributed to the sacramental—and thus hierarchical-institutional structures—in a privileged way.

⁵⁰ 50. Abbott, *The Documents of Vatican II*, p. 99.

⁵¹ 51. *Lumen Gentium*, 18.

people, by contrast, 'join in' the sacramental act of the ordained priest and 'receive' the sacraments (*Lumen Gentium*, 10, emphasis added).

When the 'divine element' of the church finds its privileged locus in the sacramental ordering of the church, it is difficult to avoid a two-tiered church, one in which the 'laity' is subordinated to the ordained ministry.⁵² From an evangelical point of view this is an inversion of the biblical 'order'. Biblically, it is none other than the *laos* which is the body of Christ, none other than the *laos* which is temple of the Holy Spirit. In this sense it can be none other than the laity that can constitute the divine 'element'. The ordained priest can be called 'divine' only 'derivatively', or more accurately, only as part of the 'divine' laity. As a description of *laos* and thus of the entire church, the term 'divine' can no longer refer to one element in distinction from the human element. Rather, the term 'divine' is a strictly relational term.

It is crucial at this point that 'relational' be sharply distinguished from 'functional'. As has been noted, from the point of view of an ontological use of 'divine' in reference to the church, any other use appears to relegate the church (in its 'being') to the level of the purely human. The church differs from other human organizations only in its function, namely, to serve a supra-human goal. But this is an erroneous, reductionist understanding of 'relational', as can be clarified by considering the 'bride-of-Christ' metaphor.

Frequently the term 'divine' is used to describe this mystery. But it can hardly mean that this 'bride' is elevated to a divine or semi-divine level or that an aspect or element of the church as bride is to be divinized. Rather, the true mystery concerns the totally and fully *human* reality of this bride. For *divine* companionship the logos need not have become human. The unique status of this bride lies in her privileged *relationship* to Christ. Switching metaphors, notions of adoption, which, by themselves, are utterly deficient with respect to Christology, are quite appropriate with respect to ecclesiology. For here it is a new, reconciled, Spirit-filled relationship that confers on the church its unique status. This relationship indeed entails Christ's unique presence to and with and in the church, as the metaphors of 'body' and 'temple' make clear. But to hypostatize this presence as a 'divine element' of the institution called the church is to overtax the biblical images and to introduce a highly problematic ecclesiological bifurcation.⁵³ Its problematic nature comes to expression particularly in the sacerdotal bifurcation of the people of God into a priestly class and the 'laity'.

The danger of falling into a merely 'functional' ecclesiology is averted, not by hypostatizing a metaphor but by taking its meaning utterly seriously. The core significance of all the major metaphors for the church— bride, body, temple, house, is *relational*. This is in no wise to be construed as if the church *is* a human entity that *has* a unique relation to God. Rather this unique entity has its *being* only *in this relation*. The church exists only *in* and *as* uniquely related to God. The church is *constituted* as bride by

⁵² 52. Even in Coffey's determined effort to rectify the discrepancy between the common and the ordained priesthood, he nevertheless distinguishes between the witness of a lay person and that of a priest as follows: '... witness to Christ expresses a property of a lay person but not his or her essence, and therefore not his or her definition'. The priest, by contrast, is an official witness to Christ; for him witness to Christ expresses his very essence (*Theological Studies* 58 (1997): 226–227. The term 'official witness' may be serviceable in an 'institutional' sense, as long as the irrepeatability of the founding 'official' witness by the apostles is observed.

⁵³ 53. The Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue raises what it calls a 'serious questions' regarding the danger of objectivizing the holiness of the church 'in specific ecclesial components in such a way that they appear to be exempt from critical questioning. Above all this Lutheran query is directed at ecclesial offices and decisions which serve people's salvation and sanctification' (*The Church and Justification*, par. 160; cf. par. 164).

her relationship to Christ, and thus to the triune initiator, originator, creator, re-creator, and sustainer of this marriage.⁵⁴ Indeed, in its proper sense, 'divine' applies to the church in that, as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, *God-in-person* makes his home within and among the people of God.

It is *by this presence* and *in this relation* that the relation between Christ and the church may be described as one of identity. The continuity between Christ and the Church is intrinsic to the nature of the church. If the searing light and crashing thunder didn't stun the zealot from Tarsus, the voice gave a whole new (ecclesiological) meaning to *coup de grace*: 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute *me*?' After all, Saul thought he was merely making life miserable for a false Jewish sect. But the one Saul was persecuting had said during his life on earth that whatever is done to the least of these brethren of mine, is done to me.

A relational, indwelling approach to the unique nature of the church in no way calls into question the continuity, or even the identification, between Christ and the church. Rather, the relational dynamic characterizes the specific nature of such continuity, identification, and representation. From an evangelical point of view, the continuity between Christ and his community lies in his presence through word and Spirit; identification lies in his total compassionate embrace of, claim on, and indwelling of his body; and representation lies in being restored after Christ's image —by his presence— and being sent by him as the Father sent the Son.

Pontifex Maximus

In view of these serious divergences are we condemned simply to ply our ecclesiologies on yonder sides of the breach? If so, the present consultation devolves into a shouting across an ecclesial canyon where the echo of our own voice threatens to drown out the voice of the other. Yet there are other possibilities for bridges across the breach.

In his ground breaking book, *The Household of Faith*, Lesslie Newbigin deals in effect with the key question treated in this paper, namely, 'What is the manner of our ingrafting into Christ?' He then examines three answers, two of which have been especially highlighted here:

The first answer is, briefly, that we are incorporated in Christ by hearing the Gospel. The second is that we are incorporated by sacramental participation in the life of the historically continuous Church. The third is that we are incorporated by receiving and abiding in the Holy Spirit.⁵⁵

He characterizes these three answers as Protestant, Catholic, and Pentecostal but adds that none of these traditions treats the three ways as mutually exclusive. Rather, each tradition 'finds the centre of religious life' in one of these ways of incorporation, under which the other ways are subsumed.

Can one move beyond the negative conclusion that the Protestant (evangelical) and the Roman Catholic approaches to the church are not mutually exclusive? Reaping the benefits of the earlier Evangelical- Roman Catholic Dialogue on Mission, we may indeed contemplate steps towards convergence—at least in understanding—between the two traditions. A key section of *ERCDOM* deals specifically with the relation of the 'Church and

⁵⁴ 54. Lesslie Newbigin's soteriological comments apply equally to the ecclesiological point made above. Having insisted that Christ 'alone is our righteousness, our holiness, our life', he adds, 'If that be condemned as a merely psychological or relational statement, we must surely answer that there is nothing more fundamental to man's being than this, that he was made in and for the love of God, and that any attempt to seek an ontological core to his being apart from this is vain'. *Household*, pp. 129–130.

⁵⁵ 55. *Household*, p. 30.

the Gospel'.⁵⁶ An introductory paragraph contains the acknowledgement that 'Evangelicals, because of their emphasis on the individual, have traditionally neglected the doctrine of the Church'. In spite of this the dialogue partners find agreement on what they call 'a four-fold relationship between the Church and the Gospel'.⁵⁷ The first is that 'the Church is part of the Gospel'. Under this heading, it acknowledges the failings of both Roman Catholics and evangelicals. 'Roman Catholics used to concentrate on the Church as a hierarchical institution. ... ' Evangelicals by contrast 'have sometimes preached an excessively individualistic gospel ... '⁵⁸ Secondly, 'the church is a fruit of the Gospel'. Interestingly, under this heading, the document explicitly mentions only an Evangelical defect, namely its tendency to emphasize personal salvation at the expense of 'the central place of the Church'. Nevertheless, Evangelical concerns about a Roman Catholic tendency to rely on institutional rites are implicitly addressed by the document's emphasis on the need of repentance and faith as '[t]he conditions for membership of the community'.⁵⁹ Third, the church is said to be 'an embodiment of the Gospel'. Here no specific deficiencies on either side are mentioned. Yet, in describing the church as the embodiment of the gospel, the document speaks of the church's role in transmitting the gospel in a way that may be understood as an evangelical form of mediation: The church 'is a community that makes present the obedient Lord who underwent death for us'.⁶⁰ Finally, *ERCDOM* describes the relation between Church and Gospel as follows: 'The church is an agent of the Gospel'. Interestingly, here it speaks of the church in relation to Christ in terms of continuation and prolongation. But it is striking that the dialogue document does not speak of the prolongation of the incarnation. Rather it asserts that 'the Church continues and prolongs the very same *mission* of Christ'.⁶¹ The dialogue report appears not to consider the importance of this agreement to be diminished by a divergence in the understanding of the specific agents of the gospel. 'For Evangelicals the agent of the proclamation is the whole community of believers. ... ' While Roman Catholics concur on this point, according to the report, they emphasize 'the special role and responsibility of the bishops' in ordering the life of the community and 'as successors to the ministry of apostolic times, to preach the good news of the Kingdom'.⁶² As acknowledged in the introduction, *ERCDOM* leaves a considerable number of important differences unresolved.⁶³ Equally important, however, is the conviction that such differences do not have the last word, for the differences do not nullify the important areas of agreement nor overshadow the deepened mutual understanding.⁶⁴

⁵⁶ 56. *ERCDOM*, pp. 65–69.

⁵⁷ 57. *ERCDOM*, p. 65.

⁵⁸ 58. *ERCDOM*, p. 66.

⁵⁹ 59. *ERCDOM*, pp. 66–67.

⁶⁰ 60. *ERCDOM*, p. 67.

⁶¹ 61. *ERCDOM*, p. 68 (emphasis added).

⁶² 62. *ERCDOM*, p. 68.

⁶³ 63. *ERCDOM*, p. 11.

⁶⁴ 64. The importance of the deep unity that exists despite important differences is also attested to by the U.S.A. document, *Evangelicals and Catholics Together*. This statement affirms the agreement that between Catholics and Evangelicals an important area of agreement exists, the contours of which are summed up in the Apostles' Creed. It is interesting, however, that the *ECT* statement fails to proceed from the *ERCDOM* consensus on the relation of the Church and the Gospel. Among the points that are thought to divide Roman

Contemplating the vast differences between Roman Catholicism and evangelicalism, one readily succumbs to severe bouts of pessimism. The possibility of real change, the need for which one tends to estimate to be greater and more redoubtable in *other* traditions, seems remote. Accordingly, it is not difficult to call into question the value of the present consultation. At such low points it may be helpful to listen to the testimonies of two prominent theologians, one Roman Catholic, the other Evangelical. Noting very real lines of convergence, yet doubting, whether these lines will ever fully intersect, Avery Dulles points to the need for conversion:

Protestantism, insofar as it cultivates a free, immediate relationship to God, based on Christ and the Gospel alone [a hallmark of Evangelicalism], views Catholic structures as impediments to the Christian life, or at least as not being necessary for all Christians. Roman Catholicism, committed to the principle of visible and symbolic mediation, is convinced that any church lacking full sacramental, hierarchical, and dogmatic structures, including the papacy as defined at the two Vatican councils, is institutionally deficient. Both positions cannot be simultaneously true. Thus the differences between these two major types of Christianity, at the present time, involve contradictions. Full unity cannot be achieved by convergence alone but only by conversion’.

Though seeming to hold an opposite point of view, calling as he does for continual convergence (*semper reformanda*) rather than conversion, Donald Bloesch in fact makes the same point.

Finally, we need to warn against both Catholic and Evangelical triumphalism whereby we seek to impose our particular confessional views upon others. The way to unity according to the triumphalist mentality lies in conversion to a particular confession. The Catholic triumphalist will sound the call back to Rome, whereas his Evangelical counterpart will seek a repristination of Calvin, Luther or simply confessional orthodoxy. Both parties are blind to the sins of their own churches and are only too ready to find fault with other church bodies. The way to reunion lies not in conversion but in convergence, in the strengthening and flowering in all churches of those elements that are rooted in the Gospel. We espouse not a return to Rome or Geneva or Wittenberg but a breakthrough into a new form of the church. Not the church of the past but the coming great church should be our vision and hope. And the best way to realize this vision is by each church seeking to reform itself in the light of the Gospel.

Could such conversion lie in a new appreciation of a dimension of evangelicalism that in large part accounts for its minimalist ecclesiology, and, when pushed, destroys the very possibility of ecclesiology, namely, the voluntarist principle? John Howard Yoder has declared that the future of the church—the entire church—lies in appropriating the voluntarist dimension: ‘The Church of tomorrow cannot but be a Believers’ Church’. This sounds, of course, like the triumphalism against which Bloesch warns. Interestingly, however, Yoder appeals in this context to Karl Rahner. Rahner describes the present situation as one of transition, ‘from a people’s church [in German, the term is likely *Volkskirche*], to a church made up of those who have struggled against their environment in order to reach a personally clearly and explicitly responsible decision of faith. This will

Catholics and Evangelicals, *ECT* mentions the divergence between an understanding of the church ‘as an integral part of the Gospel or the church as a communal consequence of the Gospel’ (See Charles Colson and Richard Neuhaus, eds., *Evangelicals and Catholics Together: Towards a Common Mission* [Dallas: Word, 1995], pp. xviii–xxii. Although the *ECT* statement acknowledges that ‘the disparity between positions’ is not ‘always so sharp as to warrant the “or”’, this statement falls short of *ERCDOM*’s conclusion that ‘the Church and the gospel belong indissolubly together’, so that this dialogue report can describe the Church as ‘an important element in the good news’ (*ERCDOM*, p. 68.).

be the church of the future or there will be no Church at all'.⁶⁸ Issued by Rahner, this challenge cannot be a call simply to adopt the voluntaristic principle but to integrate it with a deeper sense of the corporate reality called church.

No call, no challenge, no imperative as such provides adequate ground for hopefulness regarding conversion or convergence towards greater unity. The deepest ground for hope lies to our common confession. One could cite all three 'articles' of the 'Ecumenical Creeds', but most pertinent to our current consultation is the third, especially its two-fold character. In the 'Apostle's Creed' we confess: 'I believe in the Holy Spirit; I believe in the holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints'. To start with the second, we confess that the church cannot be doubled, tripled, or in any way multiplied. We *are* one. As Paul Schrotenboer has often reminded Evangelical Communities, our *primary* identity is that of *Christian*.

The confession about the one church is properly placed under the 'rubric' of the Spirit. Confessing the one church is a pneumatological confession. That this pneumatological focus is not to be taken as a rationale for resting in an invisible unity of the church is, I assume, beyond dispute. Confessing the unity of the church as a confession concerning the Holy Spirit anchors a consultation such as this in well-founded hope. Whatever stands between us and whatever 'considered opinions' we may harbour regarding the possibility, likelihood, or need of conversion on the part of our 'churches', the common confession regarding the one church is a confession regarding 'the divine'. This confession does not refer to a mere 'element' of the church. Rather the confession of the church fundamentally expresses the thrust of all of redemptive history and the pull of the coming age, namely, God's passionate desire and determined plan truly and fully to dwell among his one people. Confessing the one church means, in the title of Jürgen Moltmann's book, confessing that the one church exists 'in the power of the Spirit'. More precisely, the one church exists by virtue of the presence of the Spirit, in the *koinonia* of the Spirit. The pneumatological nature of the confession of the one church, therefore, means that no human construct—and surely division is the preeminently 'human element' in the church—is equal to the power and *presence* of the Spirit. Among the people of God the Spirit is *Pontifex Maximus*, the supreme bridge-builder. For in and by the Spirit, the Father and the Son come to make their home in and among us. No labour undertaken to manifest the unity of the church and thus to exemplify the presence and mission of the one God in our world can possibly be in vain. This is the only biblically legitimate confession of the invisible unity of the church, for this confession empowers—against all odds—the quest for the visible unity of the church. This confession empowers, more specifically, what some may regard as an unlikely consultation between representatives of the Roman Catholic Church and of the World Evangelical Fellowship.

The pressure towards visible unity of this common confession becomes even more apparent in view of mission. In this paper mission has been left out of account rather artificially because other papers prepared for this consultation are devoted specifically to this issue. Yet, the underlying missionary dynamic of the church cannot be ignored in any biblical ecclesiology. In relation to the unity of the church, three converging factors intensify 'the pressure of our common calling'. First, a strong emphasis on mission is evident both in the contemporary teaching of the Roman Catholic Church, as well as in the very origin and identity of the evangelical movement. Second, it has become increasingly clear that the church is missionary in its very nature. Third, the mission field was and is not elsewhere. The church in the West too (perhaps especially) finds itself in a missionary

⁶⁸ 68. Karl Rahner, *The Shape of the Church to Come* (London: SPCK, 1972), p. 24.

situation. For these three reasons, Newbigin's assessment is as pertinent now as when he made it nearly a half century ago:

Everything about such a missionary situation conspires to make Christian disunity an intolerable anomaly. ...

... When the Church faces out towards the world it knows that it only exists as the first-fruits and the instrument of that reconciling work of Christ and that division within its own life is a violent contradiction of its own fundamental nature. His reconciling work is one, and we cannot be His ambassadors reconciling the world to God, if we have not ourselves been willing to be reconciled to one another. It is the result of this deep connection at the heart of the Gospel itself that Churches which—within Christendom—had accepted their disunity as a matter of course, found that when they were placed in a missionary situation their disunity was an intolerable scandal.⁶⁹

Within the missionary dynamic of the one church, we face the all too human breach, relying on the divine *Pontifex Maximus*.

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The Mission of the Church

Post-Vatican II Developments in 'Official' RC Theology

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Keywords: Vatican II, Mission, Evangelism, Church, Salvation, Trinity, Contextualization, Proselytism

VATICAN COUNCIL II (1962–1965)

Pope John XXIII (1958–63) intended the Second Vatican Council of over 2,400 bishops from six continents to be the hope of the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) for 'a new Pentecost', 'a means of spiritual and apostolic renewal', 'an updating (*aggiornamento*) of the church on the edge of a new era'.

After four annual two-month sessions (1962–65), Vatican II promulgated sixteen documents with over 100,000 Latin words. The **Church** became the fulcrum or vital center for all *aggiornamento* themes in the two longest documents: on the church (*Lumen gentium* [LG], from its opening Latin words), and on the church in the modern world (*Gaudium et spes* [GS]). In their theological light bask the other fourteen statements, such as the decree on the church's missionary activity (*Ad gentes* [AG]).

Vatican II covered every major biblical / theological / ecclesiological issue, every major dimension of personal and communal renewal, of liturgical worship, of institutional life (laity, priests, and bishops), of relationships to 'Others' (whether other Christians, or

⁶⁹ 69. *Household*, 17–18.

those of other world faiths, or of no explicit religious commitment), and of missionary and service (diakonia) outreach. The council directly faced marriage and the family; the development of culture; economic and social life; the political community; war and peace in the family of nations.

Only by taking account of *all* the Vatican II debates, resolutions and later interpretations can one understand the modern RCC—and in particular for our RCC/WEF conversations, its present consensus and dissents about understandings, motivations and practices of mission, including organization, recruitment and distribution of personnel and financial resources.

POST-VATICAN II DEVELOPMENTS

The RCC as a whole, and each obediential member, were suddenly called to interiorize and carry out Vatican II's demands of fidelity. They were to do this in response to conflicting analyses of an elusively changing world and varied predictions about their consequences on human communities. In hindsight, too much came too soon for too many—a discontinuity in the presumed confidences of Catholic identity in a church which prides itself on its faithful continuity with the past.

This future shock had much to do with post-Vatican II confusion and hesitations about the missionary nature and function of the church. If most of the changes can be called 'developmental continuities' (e.g. liturgical reforms), three major themes were 'sudden discontinuities' in the tradition, which directly implicate mission understanding and practice: the decrees on religious freedom (*Dignitatis humanae [DH]*), on ecumenism (*Unitatis redintegratio [UR]*), and on the relation of the church to non-christian religions (*Nostra aetate [NA]*). The daze of future shock brought with it contrasting mission practices, and identity crises within western missionaries' own lives, within their sending organizations and supporters, and within the local churches which received these resources.

On the positive side, the incarnated fidelities to Vatican II challenges, including the risk of making mistakes, are causing holy tensions, as can be seen from the following examples:

1) experiences of the decolonization process in the newly labelled 'third world' which is struggling through the first generations of new nationhoods blessed with new freedoms and cursed with new dependency syndromes; and the local churches, more than ever indigenous in their lay and clerical leadership, are discovering their roles in nation-building, including their missionary responsibilities, at home and beyond their borders. The local churches are no longer objects but subjects of their own destinies;

2) movements of liberation theologies, initiated in Latin America, and a restructuring of local congregational life (ecclesial basic communities), so that the politically, socially and economically oppressed and powerless have a voice in the very doing of theology in a faith that *does* justice;

3) experiences of collaboration in common witness with those of like mind and spirit among the mainline and more liberal Protestant (and Eastern Orthodox) churches, at the very time when most of these are being sidelined by the fast-growing conservative Evangelicals and Pentecostals who are, for the most part, outside of present 'ecumenical' structures, and who embrace subgroups called fundamentalists;

4) experiences of living dialogue with peoples of other world faiths, especially in regions of Christian minorities (Middle East, Asia);

5) experiences of cooperation with 'all people of good will' in building up a sane family of nations and societies, peace with justice;

6) recognition of soulless economic and technical developments, especially in the West, which is stimulating the search for truth about God, about the meaning of the human, of life itself.

Nevertheless, already in the early 1960s the Vatican II bishops were uncomfortably aware of a *Zeitgeist*, a mood that was challenging the right of the church to be missionary. The articulators of this mood varied. Philosophers advocated a syncretistic union of all world religions. Internationalists judged Christian mission to be an obstacle to peaceful coexistence between nations. Neonationalists saw indigenous religion as an essential part of cultural heritage and identity which should be defended against 'outside' Christian disrupters. A growing minority of Christians in a pluralistic one-world society questioned their right and responsibility to proclaim the explicit gospel to those of other world faiths. Are missionaries but zealots who impose a disturbing religious message among peoples who want to be left alone, and should be?

The mood persists. Some observers claim to hear the death gasps of traditional missionary activities, especially direct evangelism. Some question the very validity of the biblical missionary mandate, or at least ask for more convincing reasons for it.

In the history of the church the missionary drive has always been a sign of vitality. Is its lessening today ultimately a sign of a crisis of faith? of faith in the church? of faith in Jesus Christ? of faith in God?

OFFICIAL RC RESPONSES

By 'official' I mean those teachings, directives and guidelines which come from 'the centre'—the Holy See/ Vatican, either directly from the pope or from departments of his Roman Curia. Such varied, and not always consistent, statements intentionally bear different degrees of authority or finality—a fact too often missing in their interpretations. The two major post-Vatican II mission encyclicals, Paul VI's *Evangelii nuntiandi* (EN 1975) and John Paul II's *Redemptoris missio* (RM 1990), are formally addressed to the universal RCC, and bear more magisterial weight than, say, the pope's speech at public audiences in Rome.¹

Redemptoris missio is entitled, 'on the permanent validity of the church's missionary mandate'. RM reflects official RC responses to an array of post-Vatican II positive and negative developments in the theology and practice of mission which during twenty-five years have been swirling within a world church of over 600 million adherents.²

¹ 1. Mission encyclicals enjoy a tradition, beginning with Benedict XV's *Maximud illud* (1919), then Pius XI's *Rerum ecclesiae* (1926), Pius XII's *Evangelii praecones* (1951) and *Fidei donum* (1957), and John XXIII's *Princeps pastorum* (1959). One should evaluate each papal encyclical by what is proposed and why, in the context of the teachings of Vatican II and prior general councils (e.g. Vatican Council I, 1869–70), of previous pronouncements from popes and the Roman Curia, and of writings by biblicists and theologians.

² 2. John Paul II's first encyclical on the Redeemer of humankind (*Redemptor hominis*, 1979) sets forth 'the central commitment of my new ecclesial service—the relationship between the mystery of redemption in Jesus Christ and the dignity of man', 'the church's fundamental function of every age, and particularly ours, is to direct man's gaze, to point the awareness and experience of the whole of humanity towards the mystery of Christ'. Sections of RM refer to the pope's seven prior encyclicals, in particular, on the mercy of God (*Dives in misericordia*, 1980), on the re-evangelization of Greater Europe (*Slavorum Apostoli*, 1985), on the universal action of the Holy Spirit (*Dominum et vivificantem*, 1985), and on social justice (*Sollicitudo rei socialis*, 1988).

By 1990, over 65% of Catholics were living in the southern hemisphere. The Roman Synods³ for the first time had only a minority of bishops from the northern Atlantic region, and here Catholics were decreasing by cradle or commitment. International missionary communities were fast depleting in numbers of priests, brothers and nuns from North America and Western Europe, but these institutes were being replenished by an increase of personnel in Asia, Africa, Latin America and Oceania. More and more of this latter fulltime personnel are foreign missionaries from other third-world countries, e.g., Mexicans and Koreans in Africa, Nigerians in other African countries, Indians in Thailand, Filipinos in Palestine. Lay catechists become necessary leaders in parishes; in 1996, over 300,000 in Africa.

Pope John Paul sees a 'new springtime of christianity' but also 'the waning of missionary activity specifically directed "to the nations (*ad gentes*)"' at the very time when 'God is opening before the church the horizons of a humanity more fully prepared for the sowing of the gospel'. He wants 'to clear up doubts and ambiguities' in order to 'commit all the church's energies to a new evangelization and to the mission *ad gentes*'. He sees the urgency of this commitment: since Vatican II 'the number of those who do not know Christ and do not know the church . . . has almost doubled' in the world of 5.4 billion people (RM 1-3).

In this teaching task of both affirmation and correction, RM and other elated mission statements continue to face an almost no-win total reception. On the one hand, they try to analyse church/world situations (often with overgeneralizations), and under the complex mission umbrella to synthesize a massive RC theological heritage with selected emphases and nuances. On the other hand, RM, in particular, raises realistic issues that leave room for biblicists, theologians and practitioners to debate and develop. But critics would prefer other emphases, or more detailed magisterial assertions on certain issues, or more space for open debate on the same.

Pope John Paul II's very reading of 'the signs of the times' leads him to *exclude* those assertions which go beyond the parameters of 'common' or 'ordinary' RC teaching, and, in the pope's judgement, corrode 'the permanent validity of the missionary mandate'; 1) in *theology*; 2) in *christology*; 3) in *ecclesiology*; 4) in *soteriology* (God's salvific ways); and consequently, 5) in *missiology*.⁴

CENTRAL TEACHINGS

1. *Excluded are **theologies** which deny the classic credal understandings of the mystery of the Trinity.*

³ 3. The Roman Synod brings together for one-month meetings, every 2-3 years, chosen bishops who represent the national or regional episcopal conferences on a specific theme; for example, justice in the world (1972), evangelization (1974), catechesis (1977), the laity (1987), and North and South Americas (1997).

⁴ 4. The most detailed articulations of these major themes are the documents of the International Theological Commission, esp. *Faith and Inculturation* (1989), *God the Redeemer: Selected Questions* (GR 1994), and *Christianity and World Religions* (CWR 1996). Departments of the Roman Curia issue, usually 'with the approval of the pope', lengthy statements which expand and nuance missionary themes; in particular, statements from the congregations for the Doctrine of the Faith (e.g. liberation theologies); for the Eastern Churches; for the Evangelization of Peoples; the pontifical councils for Justice and Peace; for Interreligious Relations (e.g. 1991 *Interreligious Dialogue and the Proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ*); for the Laity; for Culture; for Christian Unity (e.g., 1993 *Ecumenical Directory*). The most comprehensive official source of current teaching is the 1992 *Universal Catechism for the Catholic Church*.

For the Christian, there can be no separation between theological reflection on the one God and on the triune God. This blunt insistence responds to claims that only a 'theocentric' or non-trinitarian approach is amenable understandable to those who are not Christian, yet wish to find a common ground 'in the one divine reality, by whatever name it is called' (RM 17). The God to be proclaimed is the triune God, the missionary God of salvation.

The ultimate ground for mission does not rest in the human desire for one's own or for others' salvation, or in our love for God and people, but in the trinitarian mystery of the Sending God, centred in Christ the Sent-One (Heb. 3.1) and in the Spirit, 'the principal agent of mission'[30] who carry out the Father's saving plan: to build up the kingdom or reign of God.

Both the Bible and church tradition use different words and metaphors to describe and interpret God's mission of kingdom-building: re-capitulation, salvation, conversion, liberation, shalom-ing, reconciliation, transfiguration, etc. None of them should be 'reductive' of mission (RM 17). (Reductive examples: *salvation* applies only to 'souls', assumptions or only to those who are explicitly committed in faith and discipline to Jesus Christ as the Lord and Saviour; *reconciliation*, only to human or only to God relationships; *liberation*, only to political, social or economic conditions, or only to personal sinfulness; *transfiguration*, only to persons, and not to all cultures, humanity itself, indeed the whole of creation.) 'The kingdom of God is the manifestation and the realization of God's plan of salvation *in all its fullness*' (RM 15). It is not for us and our words to separate what the Father and the Spirit already hold together in the Word.

2. Excluded are **christologies** that deny Jesus Christ to be the fundamental, indispensable mediator between God and humankind, the sole mediator of salvation, redemption, justification, sanctification, and final reconciliation.

Jesus of Nazareth is the incarnate Word. To separate the Word from Jesus Christ, or Jesus from the Christ (a 'Jesus of Nazareth' who is other than the 'Christ of faith') is 'contrary to the Christian faith. ... Jesus of Nazareth is the incarnate Word—a single and indivisible person'. In him 'the reign of God became present and was fulfilled'. In him God wills all things to be united, in heaven and on earth [cf. Eph. 1.10]. Therefore, only in Jesus Christ is salvation, only through him comes salvation (RM 18, 6). Excluded are denials by 'the myth of God incarnate' that Jesus has no universal role but is only one among several agents in God's plan of salvation.

This is the Good News—*holistic* salvation, best articulated by Paul VI: 'As kernel and center of the Good News, Christ proclaims *salvation*, this great gift of God which is *liberation* from *everything* that oppresses man but which is, *above all*, liberation from sin and the evil one, in the joy of knowing God and being known by God, of seeing God, and of being turned over to God' (EN 9, my italics; RM 44).

3. Excluded are **ecclesiologies** that sever the relationship between the reign of God, the Christ, and his visible, structured community of disciples—the church; or that co-extends the church with the reign of God.

Vatican II corrected the sharp RC tendency (since Augustine) of identifying the church with the reign of God. As Paul VI stated in 1975: 'Only the Kingdom is absolute, and it makes everything else relative' (EN 27), even Christ's church. God rules, the kingdom happens whenever and wherever God's redemptive will is fulfilled over creation and over

human history, within or outside the visible borders of the church. This relativization of the church could be *the key shift* in post-Vatican II ecclesiology.⁵

The church, as 'sign and instrument of communion with God and of unity among all persons' (LG 1), is that part of humankind whom the triune God has called explicitly, in trusting, loving faith, to live out the divine mission of building up, in word and deed, 'the reign of Christ and of God among all peoples'. 'The reign of God cannot be detached from Christ or from the church' (RM 18), for the church is 'on earth the initial budding forth of God's reign' (LG 5), 'the sign and instrument of this reign which is and is to come' (EN 59).

This movement of being divinely sent for kingdom-building extends to the whole length and depth of ecclesial life in space and time. It transcends any and all of the church's specific tasks (e.g., initial evangelization, catechizing, teaching and preaching, worship, and selfless service), and of specific vocations within the church (e.g., the laity, the religious, and the ordained). 'The whole church is missionary by its very nature' (RM 62). The gift of mission is a calling to mission.

The mystery of the church of Christ forms 'one complex reality which comes together from a human and a divine element' (LG 8). Primarily and at its deepest level, the church is an *internal communion* (koinonia) in faith, hope and charity of those who live out their fellowship with one another and with the triune God; and secondarily, a *visible institution of means* through which this communion is brought about. Through them the internal communion is expressed and perfected in the confession of one faith, in the common celebration of divine worship, and in fraternal harmony of ministries—the Sacrament of God's love in the world.

In so far as the church does not become what it is because of sin and imperfections (including the sins against unity), 'the growth of God's reign is retarded' (UR 4), and the witness of the church to God's reign is wounded. Vatican II's *aggiornamento* translates into: 'Christ summons the church, as she goes her pilgrim way, to that *continual reformation* (reformatio perennis) of which she *always* has need, insofar as she is an human and earthly institution' (UR 6). This need is more than 'interior conversion' (UR 7), 'change of heart and holiness of life' (UR 8); it is also a 'renewal of the church (renovatio ecclesiae)' as such, 'in increased fidelity to its calling': ecclesiastical discipline, formulation of teachings, the biblical and liturgical life, the preaching of the word of God and catechetics, spirituality of married life, the church's social and teaching and activities (UR 6). The Lutheran 'ecclesia est sancta simul et semper purificanda' (LG 8) enters into the core of RC ecclesiology, which marries mission-and-unity with personal *and* communal and institutional 'purifications'.

'Distinct from Christ and the kingdom, but indissolubly united to both' (RM 19), the church is 'not an end in itself, but fervently concerned to be completely of Christ, in Christ and for Christ, as well as completely of men and women, among them and for them' (EN 34, RM 19), so that the church can 'open up for all men and women a free and sure path to full participation in the mystery of Christ' (AG 5). To say 'yes' to Christ is to say 'yes' to God's reign and to the Body of Christ, head and members—the church, the ikon of the presence of God and of the divine kingdom in the world. The church is *of* the gospel, not only its agent.

The Catholic believes that the church of Christ 'subsists' in RCC (cf. LG 8, UR 4), as a visible, structured family of local ('particular') churches, united in faith and sacraments,

⁵ 5. The reign of God is a very minor theme in Vatican II documents. But pregnant passages are LG 5: 'the church is on earth the initial budding forth of the reign of God'; and GS 39: the already/not yet 'reality of truth and life, of holiness and grace, of justice, love and peace'. In the doctrinal principles for missionary activity, *Ad gentes* uses 'reign of God' but twice, and vaguely (1, 9).

and in governance through their overseers or bishops, with and under the bishop of Rome—the pastor of the universal church who must ensure the communion of all the particular or local churches in their diversities (Code of Canon Law 331, 375). Together in the ‘college of bishops’ they bear missionary solicitude and direct responsibility for the whole church (RM 63), ‘the responsibility of proclaiming the gospel throughout the whole world’ (AG 29); each bishop ‘should be, above all, a proclaimer of the faith who brings new disciples to Christ’ (AG 20, LG 25).

Through this family of local churches, each particular church achieves growth in harmony through ‘authentic reciprocity’ (RM 64). Each should be generous and open to the needs of the others and share its spiritual and material goods. A local church is defective if it only receives or only gives, or worse, if it neither receives nor gives. ‘The evangelizing activity of the christian community, first in its own locality, and then elsewhere as part of the church’s universal mission, is the clearest sign of a mature faith’. Thus, mission is not just *from* some countries, groups, races or cultures *to* others, but *in* and *to* all. *Mission realizes the church as a communion of churches* (RM 48–49, 62–64).

INCULTURATIONS

Official statements often speak of ‘the gospel’, or ‘the church’ as if they exist in culturally disembodied forms, to which the cultures of peoples need to be ‘adapted’ by being ‘purified’, ‘elevated’, ‘transformed’, ‘perfected’, or, John Paul II’s favourite word, ‘redeemed’. But *Ad Gentes* imaged a particular church as the local incarnation of whatever in ‘the customs, traditions, wisdom, teaching, arts and sciences of the people could be used to praise the glory of the Creator, manifest the grace of the Savior, or contribute to the right ordering of christian life’ (AG 22).

To be faithful to this image of earthing the church of the gospel is to effect a profound *inculturation* in every sphere of ecclesial life: theology, ethics, primary evangelization, catechetics and preaching, liturgical worship, religious life, formation of laity and clergy, congregational life, ecumenical and interreligious relations, and canonical legislation (AG 19–22). Following the 1994 Synod of Bishops for Africa, JP II’s *Ecclesia in Africa* calls inculturation ‘one of the greatest challenges for the church on the eve of the millennium’ (59).

Inculturation works dialectically in a ‘marvelous exchange’: the transformation of a culture by the gospel, and the re-expression of the gospel in terms of that culture. ‘A faith which has not become inculturated is a faith which has not been fully received, completely thought through, faithfully lived’ (JP II, cf. CWR 26). The church is to be completely at home among each people in the same authentic way that Jesus was at home in Nazareth. This is genuine catholicity.

RM stresses the first part of the process—the transformation of a culture by the gospel, and even uses *christianity*, the already heavily cultured word which communicates more than gospel: ‘the intimate transformation of authentic cultural values through their integration in christianity and the insertion of christianity in the various human cultures’ (52). In fact, is it not an illusion to name an existing ideal culture Christianity, which is certainly not European or North American? More in practice than in theory, Rome still hesitates to confront that second necessary part of the process—the re-expression of the gospel: not only Africa to be gosselled but also the gospel to be Africanized.

The two guiding principles are ‘compatibility with the gospel and communion with the universal church’ (RM 59), but in practice since Vatican II, Rome seems to display too much fear of possible overdomesticated gospels, and too much anxiety about a potential diversified, culturally polycentric church unable to be held together in communion. Thus,

this 'particularly urgent' missionary objective of inculturation is for the pope a 'gradual, slow journey' (52), 'a difficult and delicate task' (E. in Africa 62).

Inculturation—the word first used in a papal document, *Catechesi tradendi*, 1979—is certainly 'difficult' once one goes beyond the generalities to careful analyses and critical understanding.⁶ Into what culture? Cultures, and civilizations, are not unchanging essences. All cultures, whether modern or traditional, are in rapid transition to unpredictable, moving targets. And everywhere many cultures intertwine and remain mostly unintegrated; e.g., ethnic cultures, technological versus traditional, urban versus rural mind-sets, youth values versus that of the older generations. More critical is the omnipresent, global culture of 'consumerism' which plays a conspicuous role in developing certain values, patterns of behaviour, perceptions of happiness, success and fulfillment, and attitudes towards sex and love. This assault of a global culture creates 'cultures of helplessness' (Sherif Hetata).

Are not certain gospel values in themselves always, everywhere 'counter-culture'? One is never liberated from the cross; the resurrection did not *de-crucify* Christ.

So the questions remain: how do the *gentes* of the world become the *populus Dei*? how much and what of their being *gentes* do they have to be freed *from* in order to be free *for* being mature member-communities of the one yet diverse *populus Dei*?

ECUMENISM

The one and only church of Christ bears historical divisions which contradict the will of Christ, scandalize the world, and damage the good news of reconciliation (cf. UR 1). In order that the world may believe in the Sending God, the church in the Spirit makes Christians sharers in communion with the Son, and in him, sharers in his communion with the Father. The Triune God has always blessed the church with divine gifts to be the *koinonia* (communion) of God. But because of Christian divisions, this communion is imperfect, and thus its witness is imperfect. Nevertheless, there is a true and real *koinonia* even if imperfect, existing between Christians, between the RCC and other churches and ecclesial communities.

This God-given reality of *koinonia* is the common ground or basis for the *oneness* of the ecumenical movement (also real but imperfect), and for all interchurch relations and activities.⁷ 'Real but imperfect communion' is ontologically prior to any bilateral or multilateral interchurch or ecumenical structure.⁸ And the holy objective—the

⁶ 6. The same applies to contextualization, a term also from the early 1970s, used more often in evangelical circles. Cf. Darrell L. Whiteman, 'Contextualization. The Theory, the Gap, the Challenge', *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, Jan. 1997, 2–7.

⁷ 7. At the founding conference of the Evangelical Alliance in 1846 (London), the 800 delegates resolved that the EA is 'a voluntary union of individual Christians of different churches'. And the basis: 'essential unity is the invisible bond existing eternally between all(continued) believers ... whereas visible unity was that which these believers had to create among themselves as a testimony to the world'. Although in another resolution, the EA did not assume to itself 'the right authoritatively to define the limits of Christian brotherhood', the definite posture was strong opposition to Roman Catholicism. Cf. David Howard, *The Dream That Would Not Die. WEF, 1846–1986* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1986), p. 10. Catholics were objects of evangelical missions.

⁸ 8. Ecumenical structures, such as local, national and regional councils of churches and the World Council of Churches, are necessary but transient. They can easily become sectarian by including only a sampling of actual Christian diversity, and in fact reach a practical ceiling far short of their professed intent and vision. Their tents are too small. Needed is an acceptable 'forum for regular interchange, on a full and equal basis, between Roman Catholic, Pentecostal, Orthodox, evangelical, ecumenical Protestant, independent and

reconciliation of all Christians in the one and only church of Christ—transcends our human powers and gifts (UR 24), our finite plans and limited visions. ‘Hoping for what we cannot see means awaiting it with patient endurance’ ([Rom. 8:25](#)).

What does God call disciples of Christ and the churches to be and to do in the *one* reality of ‘real but imperfect communion’? Does not the Lord of history use even our sinful and finite imperfections in his service? ‘The Spirit helps us in our weaknesses’ ([Rom. 8:26](#)). Ecumenical and missionary activities are an inseparable duet: unity in mission, mission in unity. Even while the churches are divided, together they are called already to common witness by manifesting, especially through joint efforts, whatever divine gifts of truth and life they *already* share and experience together.⁹

4. Excluded are **soteriologies** that claim that because God’s universal will is that every man and woman should be rescued from sin, death and judgement, every person is saved from the beginning to the end of God’s salvation process, whether that person is explicitly Christian or not.

Also excluded are soteriologies that restrict God’s free initiative of salvation through undeserved grace, either by placing those divine initiatives only within the explicit Christian arena (e.g., explicit faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, and explicit membership in the church), or by binding them to human intentions and efforts (even evangelism campaigns can easily be ‘works over faith’).

The old question of ‘the salvation of the unbeliever’ and *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* (outside the church no salvation) finds a more developed answer in Vatican II,¹⁰ and a more focused response in John Paul II’s Christian anthropology (the reality of grace in the human). How can people be saved who never arrive at explicit faith in Jesus Christ, indeed for so many, even explicit faith in God, since Catholic dogma teaches that no one can be justified without faith (Council of Trent, 1548, Decree on Justification, 7)?

Already in his first encyclical (1979) pope John Paul states: ‘The human person—every person, without exception—has been redeemed by Christ; because Christ is in a way united to every human person—every person, without exception even if the individual may not realize this fact. Christ, who died and was raised up for all—for every human being and for all—can through his Spirit offer man the light and the strength to measure up to his or her supreme destiny’ (RH 14).¹¹ And in 1985: ‘Since Christ died for all, and since the ultimate vocation of man is in fact one, and divine, we ought to believe that the Holy Spirit in a manner known only to God offers to every person the possibility

indigenous Christian churches’. S. Mark Helm, ‘The Next Ecumenical Movement,’ *Christian Century*, (Aug. 14–21, 1996), 781.

⁹ 9. Cf. the 1970 study document of the RCC/WCC Joint Working Group, *Common Witness and Proselytism*, in *Mission Trends* N. 2, eds. G. Anderson/T. Stransky (NY/ Grand Rapids: Paulist/Eerdmans, 1975). T. Stransky, ‘Common Witness,’ in *The Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, eds. N. Lossky, J.M. Bonino, J. Pobee, T. Stransky, G. Wainwright, Pauline Webb, (Geneva/Grand Rapids: WCC/Eerdmans, 1991), pp. 197–200.

¹⁰ 10. On tracing the long history of the RC debates and responses, cf. Francis A. Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church?* (NY: Paulist, 1992).

¹¹ 11. Missiologist Gerald Anderson (evangelical Methodist) regards this papal sentence as, ‘the single most significant doctrinal statement of the Catholic church for mission theology since Vatican Council II’. *Christ’s Lordship and Religious Pluralism*, eds. G. Anderson/ T. Stransky (Maryknoll NY: Orbis, 1981), p. 111.

of being associated with this paschal mystery [of salvation]' (*Dominum et vivificantem* 53. cf. GS 22).¹²

'The Spirit offers everyone the possibility of salvation through human cooperation, and works in everyone through "seeds of the Word" found in human initiatives—including religious ones—and in human efforts to attain truth, goodness, and God himself' (RM 26, citing Vatican II texts). Thus, a twofold respect informs our relationship with other persons, whether Christian, religious or not: 'respect for the person in his/her quest for the deepest questions of one's life, and respect for the action of the Spirit in him/her' (29). 'Salvation, always a gift of the Spirit, requires man's cooperation, both to save oneself and to save others' (9). But the human person is free, and one can choose to respond with a rebellious fundamental 'No'.

Those Christians who are not Roman Catholics belong to the Church or *Koinonia* of Christ. They are of communions which are ecclesial means by which Christ mediates salvation, because in these churches and ecclesial communities his one, holy church is really, if imperfectly, present and operative.

But so many non-Christians live in communities of other faiths/ religions. Are they saved *despite* that community or somehow *through* it? Can they mediate salvation to their faithful adherents?

In different degrees other world faiths contain 'gaps, insufficiencies and errors'. Nevertheless, the presence of the Spirit of Christ and the action of the Saving God is in these faith-community through their 'saving elements' (RM 55–56). The religions can be carriers of saving truth only in so far as they raise man and women to the true love of God and neighbour (CWR 87). In referring to the Day of Prayer for Peace (Assisi, 1986), in which representatives of the major Christian communions and of non-Christian religions took part, pope John Paul maintained that 'every authentic prayer is called forth by the Holy Spirit, who is mysteriously present in the heart of every person' (to Roman Curia, Dec. 22, '86).

This universal action of the Spirit cannot be separated from or confused with the specific, peculiar action that develops in the body of Christ, his church (RM 28–29, CWR 81–86).

'Other religious traditions' are 'participated forms of mediation of differing kinds and degrees', but 'they acquire meaning and value *only* from Christ's own mediation, and they cannot be understood as parallel or complementary to His' (RM 8). At the same time, the current RC position would exclude the theological judgement that all other religions are fundamentally wrong ways of approaching God because they are religions of 'self-redemption, self-justification and self-sanctification' (Henrick Kraemer, following Karl Barth).

Dialogue with those of 'other religions' is not opposed to mission but is one of its expressions (RM 55). Nor does dialogue 'originate from tactical concerns or self interest' but is based on respect for the person and for the Spirit who blows where the Spirit pleases ([In. 3:8](#)). 'Other religions constitute a positive challenge for the church. They stimulate both to discover and acknowledge the signs of Christ's presence and the working of the Spirit, as well as to examine more deeply the church's own identity and to bear witness to the fullness of revelation which she has received for the good of all' (RM 56).

¹² 12. This Vatican II single reference (GS 22) to the universal presence of the Holy Spirit offering grace to every person the possibility of being associated with the paschal mystery of Christ becomes foundational, the principal theme in every context in which JP II speaks or writes about the 'non-Christian world'.

THE JEWISH PEOPLE

The relationship of the church to the Jewish people is unique. The Jews, then, today and always, remain a chosen people. Their election stills stands. God has never revoked the people of God of the old covenant (NA 4). Catholics should respect the continuing integrity and spiritual fecundity of the Jewish people. Thus, excluded would be supersessionism, whereby the church of the new covenant displaces or replaces the Jews of the old. Nevertheless, the church, in which alone 'the fullness of the means of salvation can be found, must of its very nature proclaim Jesus Christ to the world, for through Him we go to the Father ... The church and Judaism cannot be seen as two *parallel* ways of salvation and the church must witness to Christ as the Redeemer of all'¹³.

Questions remain. What is the eschatological destiny or fulfillment of the Jewish people in relation to their permanent election, and to the incomplete, wounded catholicity of the church as long as the 'proto- schism' is not healed? What is the continuing mission of the church to the synagogue, of the synagogue to the church, and their common mission as two peoples 'elected' to humanity?¹⁴

In short, everyone *can* be saved, but one *is* saved when 'good faith', 'sincere heart' and conscience-dictated deeds are present. God's undeserved, free initiating grace is always necessary, as *somehow* necessary is Christ's mediation, and *somehow* 'a mysterious relationship' to the church (RM 10)—not *extra* (outside) but *sine* (without) *ecclesia nullus salus*. The *somehows* of 'the ways of God', the saving yes's and the damning no's to ever present saving grace in decisions by free persons, are left to theologians, as are the far less developed *somehows* on the relation of the reign of God, of the Christ and of his church to other communities of religious faith.

If the above be true in Catholic faith, then 'why the church'? 'why be a Christian'? Paul VI spoke of 'insidious excuses' which justify the relinquishing of evangelization: 'Why proclaim the gospel when the whole world is saved by uprightness of heart? We know that the world and history are filled with "seeds of the word"; is there not therefore an illusion to claim to bring the gospel where it already exists in the seeds the Lord himself has sown?' (EN 80). In short, what is the content of the missionary mandate that has permanent validity? To summarize that mandate, as now 'officially' understood:

1. The nature of the church, as the social, incarnational presence of the grace of Christ in the world, demands its striving to become visibly present in every culture, in every historical context.¹⁵
2. In 'the one mystery of salvation' (RM 9), 'all people are searching, albeit at times in a confused way' (11), and need 'the communion of life, love and truth' which is the church—the *totus Christus*, Christ the head and the members (Augustine), 'the

¹³ 13. The Vatican Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, *Notes on the correct way to present Jews and Judaism in preaching and catechesis in the Roman Catholic Church* (1985), I, 7.

¹⁴ 14. For these and other questions still on the table, cf. T. Stransky, in *Unanswered Questions: Theological Views of Jewish-Catholic Relations*, ed. Roger Brooks, (Notre Dame IN: U. of Notre Dame Press, 1988), pp. 63–69.

¹⁵ 15. Complement this by the summary of Waldron Scott, former WEF general secretary: '... contemporary evangelical concern focuses on evangelization as the proclamation of the gospel in every nation rather than the conquest of religions per se, or the total conversion of religiously based cultures. If as a result of proclaiming the gospel a particular people—tribe, caste, or other—turns to Christ in toto, well and good. If it does not, the mandate to preach the gospel to every culture and make disciples in all nations remains. The Great Commission has never been rescinded' ' "No Other Name"—an Evangelical Concern', in *Christ's Lordship and Religious Pluralism*, op. cit., 63.

instrument of salvation for all' (9). 'The church is the ordinary means of salvation, and she alone possesses the fullness of means of salvation' (55). Thus, 'the universal call to salvation includes the call of all men [and women] to the catholic unity of the people of God' (CWR 69, cf. LG 13).

3. A true lived-out conversion to the historical Jesus the Christ is a qualitatively radical decision, 'not simply providing a way of interpreting transcendence, but its greatest realization' (CWR 24). *Spirit* means movement toward, the direction. The Spirit guides the disciples of Christ toward the whole truth ([Jn. 16:12-13](#)). 'The Spirit guides along the way that Jesus is, the way that leads to the Father' (CWR 59, cf. 53). 'Only in the church, which is in historical continuity with Jesus, can his mystery be fully lived out. Hence the inescapable necessity for the church of announcing Christ' (CWR 49).
4. Being a member of the church, 'the privileged sphere of the Spirit's action' (CWR 61), does not guarantee a person's salvation, but 'not from one's own merits but from the grace of Christ' (LG 14), it does provide the opportunity in faith and trust to realize and experience a greater fullness of life in Christ than would be available to non-Christians.
5. The reign of God is built up primarily by prayerful acts of adoration, contrition, thanksgiving and petition before the Father, in the name of Jesus and in the Spirit. The liturgy is 'the summit (culmen) toward which all the activity of the church is directed, and at the same time the fount (fons) from which all her power flows' (Vat. II SC 10). And in the celebration of the paschal mystery, the church fulfils her mission service in representing all humankind and in being efficacious for all men and women (cf. CWR 77). Is not the culmination of mission the gatherings of all peoples in the eucharistic sharing of the bread and the cup, with and in Christ the priest?

5. Excluded are **missiologies** that so restrict the church's missionary purposes and activities that the church need not try to offer all men and women, everywhere, their God-given right: a valid opportunity to be directly challenged by the explicit gospel of explicit faith in Jesus Christ and in his church.

'The church cannot fail to proclaim that Jesus came to reveal the face of God, ... that true liberation consists in opening oneself to the love of Christ, "our peace" ([Eph. 2:14](#)), and to his church' (RM 11).

Excluded would be dichotomies between the proclamation of this good news and, for example, concern for justice in the world as peripheral consequence. 'Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of society is a *constitutive dimension of the mission of the church and the proclamation of the gospel*; or in other words, of the church's mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation' (1971 Roman Synod statement, *Justice in the World*). Here one moves away from assertions that the church has no proper mission in the political, economic or social order. The move, above all, is based on the human person's dignity of being already in Christ. The person is redeemed in Christ, shares in the life of God's love, and in his sonship—mysteriously and inchoatively, but nonetheless really. To tell the human person this (evangelization) is to do whatever can remind one of his/her true dignity. To deny one his/her rights or to tolerate their deprivation by economic, social and political conditions

and structures is *counter*—proclamation (counter = told of one's real lack of worth and dignity.¹⁶)

Thus, in the explicit gospel proclamation, two dimensions are integrated: everyone, everywhere, should have the opportunity to be challenged by the explicit gospel of explicit faith in Jesus Christ, the one Lord and Saviour of all; and in that one commitment to be a disciple of Christ is the responsibility to carry out God's works of justice and compassion by service to individuals, groups and societal structures in temporal need, especially in the promotion of human dignity and in the defence and fostering of human rights.

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM, WITNESS AND PROSELYTISM

Irreplaceable, initial proclamation is a permanent *priority* in the complex reality of mission among human communities (RM 44). In proclamation the church should respect and foster the right of the person and of communities to social and civil freedom; that is, freedom from any coercion to act against conscience and prevention from expressing belief in teaching, worship, or social service (DH 4). But more than that, proclamation should respect the gospel pedagogy of Christian witness and avoid whatever does not conform to the ways God draws free persons to respond to divine calls to serve God in spirit and in truth. Otherwise Christian witness is corrupted, becomes counter-proclamation or proselytism.

Since Vatican II, Roman Catholic and wider ecumenical circles have become much more sensitive to the distinction between authentic witness and proselytism in proclamation and other missionary activities, e.g. diaconal assistance to the needy. They are rightly afraid of committing acts of spiritual violence (use Jesus as a club with which to herd people into salvation camps called churches); or of being arrogantly disrespectful of non-Christians ('You are nothing in God's eyes and heart unless you explicitly believe in Jesus as Lord and Saviour'); or of repeating past imperialisms (the presumed rights of God-squads prevail over 'mere' human freedoms, including the right to be free from the manipulative hardsell).

More recently, ecumenical Christians are placing the interchurch problems of civic religious freedom and proselytism in the context of 'real although imperfect koinonia' (respect the ecclesial reality of other churches) and common witness (not the counter-witness of competitive ways and means which contradict the spirit of 'doing the truth in charity' ([Eph. 4:15](#))).

Acceptable though the witness/ proselytism distinction is, there are occurring increased allegations of proselytism and antagonistic competition in mission. Well-intentioned, and often well-financed, evangelistic activities may often ignore the Christian reality of other churches and their pastoral practice, or be insensitive towards their more vulnerable members (e.g. new immigrants or refugees from different religious cultures—Hispanic peoples in the USA, or firmly rooted Eastern Orthodox and Eastern Catholics in the Middle East). Or mission strategies may aim to re-evangelize baptized but 'non-practising' members of other churches, but there are different interpretations and criteria of who is 'unchurched', 'dechurched', 'nominal', or not a 'true' believer. Or in the situations of new civic religious freedoms, e.g., Eastern Europe and former USSR, some churches judge that others, usually Western European/North American missionaries, are unduly pressuring their members to change church allegiance.

¹⁶ 16. Cf. Richard A. and McCormick, S.J., 'Human Rights and the Mission of the Church,' in *Mission Trends*, No. 4, eds. G. Anderson and T. Stransky (New York and Grand Rapids: Paulist and Eerdmans, 1979), pp. 37–50.

In these very concrete situations, too often diatribe from-a-distance dominates over face-to-face dialogue, and defaces ‘the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace’ ([Eph. 4:5](#)).¹⁷

MISSION AD GENTES

RM develops *Ad Gentes*’ threefold division of human communities. First are ‘peoples, groups and socio-cultural contexts in which Christ and His gospel are unknown, or which lack local Christian communities sufficiently mature to be able to incarnate the faith in their own environment and proclaim it to other groups’. These arenas call for *mission ad gentes*, strictly speaking: primary or initial evangelization and founding or developing of local churches. A second group includes those communities in which the already established church functions normally: solid ecclesial structures, fervent faith in practice, ‘a sense of commitment to the universal mission’. These communities call for *pastoral care*. The third group consists of those communities in areas with ancient Christian roots in which the baptized have lapsed in their faith and practice, becoming either nominal church adherents or *de-churched*. These communities call for *re-evangelization* (RM 33).

Unlike Vatican II’s *Ad Gentes*, RM does not slight this third category. It perceptively recognizes that one cannot detail a world, even a region, by a map with different colours of clear boundaries between missionary and pastoral and re-evangelizing activities.

Furthermore, if an objective of mission *ad gentes* is ‘to found Christian communities and develop particular churches to their full maturity by functioning normally in its local setting’ (RM 48), it is not clear where such churches are, and when normal functioning begins.

Because of so many new multicultural situations created by migrants, refugees and immigrant faiths, especially in burgeoning urban centres in all continents, in the final analysis no local church is so totally ‘functioning normally’ that it can eschew home-mission *ad gentes*. No culture exists which is definitively permeated by gospel values. Mission *ad gentes* remains in and to six continents.

CONCLUSION

The above are only my short-hand versions of some post-Vatican II developments in ‘official’ RC teachings on the mission of the church. They exemplify the more fundamental struggle of the RCC which tries not to be a self-centred, arrogant clan but to be a selfless, humble servant-community which enters into profound solidarity with the experiences of human society, takes humanity seriously in the unfolding of its history, and places *the mystery of the Triune God’s agape within the humanum*. For the most fundamental movement in God’s history with humankind is not that of Christians, say Roman Catholics and Evangelicals, towards one another, but of all people towards communion in the One God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

As an ageing Catholic, I feel in the heart of the RCC those key creative tensions of expressing those divine gifts or properties of the church of Christ which ‘subsist’ in the RCC: one, holy, catholic and apostolic. These tensions are:

- a). between the necessary unity without uniformity of the RCC and legitimate, indeed necessary diversity without contradictions and divisions, during its transition, as one

¹⁷ 17. So the questions on the plate of dialogue: What kinds of Catholics do Evangelicals regard as objects of Christian mission? What kinds as partners in mission? Cf. T. Stransky, ‘A Catholic Looks at Evangelical Protestant’, *Priests and People* (Jan. 1998), p. 8.

family of varied local churches in six continents, from the northern Atlantic centre to a polycentric worldwide basis. And the tensions between the historical phenomenon of One Church and yet many churches—the RCC and other churches in their common calling to search together, ‘without prejudicing the future inspirations of the Holy Spirit’ (UR 24), for that full koinonia when all the churches will be able freely to recognize in each other the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church *in its fullness*. **['One']**

- b). between the fullness of Christian life and the perfection of love in adoring God in the moral community of ‘The Way’ ([Acts 9:2, 22](#)) of right living and conduct ‘in Christ’, and the embrace of a good yet sinful world, with choices, often ambiguous, of compassionate love of neighbour. **['Holy']**
- c). between the gospel message, ever old without being imprisoned by the past, to be proclaimed among all *gentes*, and, ever new without being ‘trendy’; its inculturations or integration of all that is authentically human. **['Catholic']**
- d). between the one mission of Ministry of teaching, worship and service inspired by the evangelical vision and teaching of the original apostles (Tradition), and the many traditions and ministries, always to be purified and renewed, in order that Ministry is faithfully effected. **['Apostolic']**

Furthermore, mission means sending. Surely as witnesses to ‘the Faithful and True Witness’ ([Rev. 3:14](#)), we Catholics and Evangelicals, who have been baptized into the one Body and are of the same healing, reconciling Spirit, have been sent neither to be enemies nor to be strangers to one another, but we are sent to be brothers and sisters in Christ on behalf of all peoples.

I am convinced that the ‘working paradigm’ in the present witness of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church is: **The unceasing search, in season and out of season, for mission in unity and unity in mission: the obligation to draw all Christians together, through the personal, communal and institutional renewal of our churches, into the One Church of Christ always in reformation; and the obligation of the whole church to proclaim by word and deed, the whole gospel of salvation to the whole world, as the servant both to that gospel and to that world.**

I bluntly ask the WEF: if historically so many evangelicals displayed a willingness to follow and witness Christ even into separation because of a commitment to *the truth of mission*, are Evangelicals now willing to be led into *the truth of unity* for the sake of the same mission? How essential is ecumenism, abstracted from its present institutional forms, to the continued renewal of a *true missionary church*?

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Missionary Dynamism in Search of Missiological Discernment

An Evangelical perspective on Mission

Samuel Escobar

Keywords: Mission, Lausanne, Ecumenical, Holy Spirit, Christology, Evangelical, Church

If you ask an Evangelical missionary for a short simple statement about the aim of Christian mission the answer will probably be 'the proclamation of the gospel and the call of persons to a living faith in Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord'. A historical review points to the origins of the Evangelical missionary effort in movements of spiritual renewal within Protestantism which emphasized personal faith and commitment. The sources for this concept of mission can be traced back to basic theological tenets of the 16th century Reformation, but they were accentuated by the influence of Pietism and the Awakenings in the development of the Protestant missionary movement. Historian Latourette says, 'Protestantism, particularly in the types which were most active in the spread of the faith, tended to stress the individual, the conversion of the individual, and the right and duty of each Christian to think for himself'.¹ Evangelicals can have a clear commitment to mission and a widespread and enthusiastic involvement in the Christian missionary enterprise without having a well defined ecclesiology.

In this paper about the Evangelical concept of mission my intention is to bring missiological questions to our dialogue. I am aware that my selection and treatment of those questions will be coloured by my experience as a Latin American Evangelical, but I am also relatively well acquainted with evangelical persons and movements in other parts of the world. Some of these questions are now part of ongoing conversations and debates within both camps and also between them. The questions that provoke such conversations and debates are posed by missiologists or by theologians who try to interpret the missionary situation in the world on the eve of a new century. Several of those Evangelical and Roman Catholic missiologists and theologians have demonstrated, in their experience and in their writing, an openness to dialogue and to mutual recognition, without denying that almost unsurmountable barriers divide them.² One should not forget that at the beginning of the protestant ecumenical movement of our century the drive towards ecumenism was born from an Evangelical commitment to mission. Dialogue, reflection and theologizing at that point were nurtured by questions and impulses coming from the frontier situations where mission took place. Evangelicals have lamented the loss of that missionary dimension in the World Council of Churches.

BACKGROUND OF MISSIOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENTS AMONG EVANGELICALS

To have an adequate framework for this dialogue it is necessary to recall the general trends and movements that have developed during the second half of this century. Within it we can place events such as the birth of the World Evangelical Fellowship, the growth of an American Evangelical missionary vitality, the Vatican II Council, and the Lausanne movement. I will dwell for a moment on this because of its impact on the evangelical concept of mission. The Lausanne movement was preceded by three vigorous Evangelical movements following World War II. *First*, the renewal of mass evangelism that reached

¹ 1. Kenneth Scott Latourette, *History of the Expansion of Christianity*, Vol. IV (New York: Harper and Row, 1941), p. 45.

² 2. In the American Society of Missiology as well as in the Overseas Ministries Study Center there is active and valuable cooperation between Conciliar Protestants, Catholics and Evangelicals.

public notice with Billy Graham in Los Angeles, 1949. Some classic elements of revivalistic Protestantism combined with the use of mass media shook the dormant religious routine of people, especially in the big cities, first in North America and then in Europe. *Second*, there was a renewal of serious Evangelical scholarship in biblical studies and theological reflection, following a renewal of evangelical university life in Europe and especially Great Britain. *Third*, strong evangelical churches and movements had emerged around the world, connected to the post-World War II stream of missionary fervour and activity from North America and Europe. Independent 'faith missions' had played an important role in this emergence, representing a new generation that threw itself with great vigour into the task of planting churches, translating Scripture and reaching the restless masses of the Third World through evangelism.

These three movements exemplify the type of Evangelical churches, missionary organizations and denominational renewal groups that find a way of expressing their concern for Christian unity and cooperation in alliances such as WEF or the Lausanne movement. Their variety also explains the tensions that develop within those alliances or umbrella movements which sometimes are unable to contain them. The volunteerism which is the genius of Evangelical life and mission is a key factor in understanding these developments. The 'faith mission' type of missionary activity contributes to the rise of vigorous Evangelical churches in the Third World, which are independent and have no connection with the historic Protestant denominations. Ecclesiology is undefined in these independent churches. Their participation in Evangelical Alliances brings them into contact with Evangelicals inside the mainline churches. The encounter is mutually enriching but it also accounts for a long and difficult process of theological dialogue and definition. There is a dialectical interaction between the vitality that comes from these movements at the grassroots and the direction and stimulation that the alliances themselves provide. In order to understand the Evangelical position, both the promise and the precariousness of this dynamic have to be appreciated and its historical significance has to be evaluated theologically.

The three movements mentioned above converged in the Berlin 1966 World Congress on Evangelism, convened under the leadership of theologian Carl F.H. Henry, to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the magazine *Christianity Today*. The vision of the Berlin congress was summarized in its motto, 'One Race, one Gospel, one Task'. One important fact about Berlin is that Evangelicals acknowledged and accepted the validity and significance of the Pentecostal movement. The follow-up congresses after Berlin were platforms of convergence not only for reaffirming Evangelical truth, but also for sober consideration of the spiritual needs of the world. The pragmatic concerns of Evangelicals from North America, and the theological and missiological acumen of European Evangelicals, were matched by the restless sense of mission of Evangelicals in the young churches of the Third World or among the oppressed minorities. The agenda of the ongoing reflection had to make room for the burning questions of those who were witnessing to their faith in Jesus Christ within situations where the ferment of nationalism, social upheaval and ideological conflict were testing the theological depth of both Evangelical and non-evangelical missionaries and churches. Thus Lausanne '74 was preceded by the regional congresses in Singapore (1968), Minneapolis (1969), Bogotá (1969), Ottawa (1970), Amsterdam (1971), and Madrid (1974).

The Lausanne Covenant expresses this unique missiological moment. Precisely at the point in time in which Evangelical Christianity was joyfully aware of its global dimension, it also became painfully aware of its serious shortcomings. Liberated by its missionary thrust from the bonds of sterile fundamentalism, Evangelicalism was able to rediscover the holistic dimensions of the Christian mission that are clearly presented in the Bible.

The Lausanne Covenant restates convictions that are characteristic of Evangelicalism. It starts with a trinitarian confession, a statement about the authority of the Bible and an expression of Christological conviction (LC Par. 1–3). At the same time, the Covenant expresses repentance for what was wrong or missing in the way in which Evangelicals had been accomplishing their missionary task. Key missiological definitions about the nature of evangelism, Christian social responsibility, the church and evangelism, Gospel and culture the need for cooperative ventures and new forms of partnership as well as the urgency of the evangelistic task, show the result of reflection on praxis developed during this century (LC Par. 4–11). Christian hope in the midst of persecution, the conviction about the power of the Holy Spirit and the expectation of the return of Christ complete the statement of faith and purpose of the Lausanne consensus (LC Par. 12–15).

I think it possible to summarize in four points the direction of the process of the Lausanne '74 event, as well as the content of the Covenant it issued. They express a forceful challenge to adopt a new form of missionary practice for world evangelization and a corresponding call for new theological formulation. First, was a commitment to a concept of *holistic* mission that retains the Evangelical emphasis on proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ while also describing the kind of missionary presence it requires, and the call to discipleship and incorporation into the church (LC Par. 4). Inherent in this is self-criticism of the type of dualistic spiritualization that had come to be prevalent in the practice of Evangelical missionaries. Mission relates to every area of human need. For the majority of Evangelicals, however, holistic mission has evangelism as a key and primary component: 'In the church's mission of sacrificial service evangelism is primary' (LC Par. 6).

Second, was the call for *cooperation* in the mission task—between church and para-church, mainline and evangelical, Pentecostal and Reformed—based solely on the missionary passion shared in the Lausanne event, and the basic theological consensus reached in the Covenant itself. The sheer magnitude of the task of world evangelization but also the scandal of sterile division and competition among missionary agencies demanded a new attitude. The sense of urgency of reaching those still unreached even makes room for the type of concern that had been underlying the call for a 'moratorium' (LC Par. 7, 8, 9).

Third, and closely related to the previous point, was the awareness that in the post-imperial era in which we live, the missionary and the theological tasks have a *global* dimension. Christians and missionaries from the European and North American regions, once strongholds of Evangelical faith in the past, had to acknowledge the spiritual decline in those regions and the rise of new thriving churches in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Thus, neither imperialism nor provincialism could be tolerated.

Fourth, was the commitment to consider seriously the *context* of mission. Issues such as culture, education of leaders, spiritual conflict and persecution were addressed (LC Par. 10–13). The need was recognized for an evaluation of the social, ideological and spiritual struggles that surround and condition the missionary enterprise, in order to design a relevant type of discipleship for our own times.

Because of this preceding process, Lausanne was not the missiological and theological monologue of European or North American Evangelicals, but a brotherly global dialogue of a community that had grown beyond expectations all over the world: a dialogue in search of ways of obedience to the missionary imperatives of Jesus, our Saviour and Lord. Throughout that process the question of relationships with Roman Catholicism was not given much attention though at several points distinctive convictions that separate Evangelicals from Roman Catholics were expressed. There were Roman Catholic observers at the Lausanne Congress but they were not given any prominence or visibility.

After Lausanne, the dialogue and search for cooperation continued in a kind of creative tension within two poles. Some tried to work out the newly perceived vision of holistic mission, while others such as missiologist Donald McGavran and the Church Growth movement continued to emphasize evangelism as the central focus of mission. McGavran wrote: 'In mission today many tasks must be carried on together, yet the multiplicity of good activities must contribute to and not crowd out maximum reconciliation of men to God in the Church of Jesus Christ.' In the Consultation at Pattaya (1980) it became evident that American Evangelicals of this sector were looking for a more pragmatic methodological approach that would pursue a narrower missionary agenda. There was a strong emphasis on frontier missions and on people who had never heard the gospel. These came to be considered the main target of missionary efforts and global plans. The concept of 'unreached peoples' was developed, as well as the idea of a '10/40 window', which would be the area of the planet where most such unreached masses are located. The managerial approach characteristic of this missiology insisted on strategic steps based on information banks and management by objectives.

For the celebration of fifteen years of the Lausanne movement, a 'Lausanne II' conference was organized for late 1989, to be held in Manila, Philippines. The Church Growth sector organized a 'Global Consultation on World Evangelization' (GCOWE) in Singapore, in January of the same year, and adopted a 'Great Commission Manifesto' with the motto 'A Church for Every People and the Gospel for Every Person by the year 2000'. Movements such as 'AD 2000' and 'DAWN' are committed to the implementation of this motto.³ Thomas Wang has summarized its aim:

The purpose is to motivate and network church leaders by channeling vision through consultation, prayer efforts and written materials for the purpose of establishing a mission-minded church planting movement within every unreached people and urban center by AD 2000 so that all peoples have a valid opportunity to experience the love truth and saving power of Jesus Christ.⁴

There is in these movements a reluctance to deal with theological issues. It is considered that those have already been defined at Lausanne and that what is left is a practical task. Here it is important to remember an observation of Alistair McGrath who reminds us that Evangelicalism is actually a movement to recover the Christian orthodoxy expressed in the ecumenical creeds, with an emphasis on the need for a personal appropriation of faith, but with 'a marked reluctance to allow any matters of lesser importance to get in the way of the proclamation and application of the Gospel'.⁵

EVANGELICALS AND CATHOLICS

Many Evangelicals who found the Lausanne Covenant (1974) an adequate expression of their convictions also gave a warm welcome to the Apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* from Pope Paul VI. Evangelical mission theologians such as David Bosch and John Stott pointed to some important coincidences and signs of convergence. In fact,

³ 3. Brief descriptions and interpretations of these developments may be found in Arthur F. Glasser, 'The Evangelicals: Unwavering Commitment, Troublesome Divisions', in Gerald H. Anderson et. al., Eds. *Mission in the Nineteen 90s* (Grand Rapids/New Haven: Eerdmans/OMSC, 1991).

⁴ 4. 'What does "reached" mean? An EMQ survey', *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* (July 1990), p. 323.

⁵ 5. Alister McGrath, *Evangelicalism & the Future of Christianity* (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 1995), p. 65.

without any intention of triumphalistic self congratulation, one could document the impact of evangelical missionary vitality on Catholic missiologists. This convergence was an important factor in the inauguration of the Evangelical-Roman Catholic Dialogue on Mission (ERCDOM) which took place between 1977 and 1984.⁶ The Official Report of this dialogue shows a good number of points of agreement between Evangelicals and Roman Catholics, and is organized around seven basic themes: Revelation and Authority, The Nature of Mission, The Gospel of Salvation, Our Response in the Holy Spirit to the Gospel, the Church and the Gospel, the Gospel and Culture and the Possibilities of Common Witness. The Report also defines with great clarity the points of disagreement and the limitations of dialogue. However it ends with an expression of hope: 'We hope that dialogue on mission between Roman Catholics and Evangelicals will continue, preferably on a regional or local basis, in order that further progress may be made towards a common understanding, sharing and proclaiming of "the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints" ([Jude 3](#))'.

The Lausanne movement, however, is not a movement where churches or denominations are officially represented. Some of the hard questions that come after evangelism and after the initial missionary step of planting churches, are posed in Evangelical bodies that do have representation of denominations or churches, such as the World Evangelical Fellowship (WEF). In 1980 WEF asked an Ecumenical Issues Taskforce to work on a document about a contemporary Evangelical perspective on Roman Catholicism. The report from this task force was completed in 1985, approved in 1986 and published in 1987.⁷ When the Report of ERCDOM was made public, it was evident that it had a more irenic and nuanced tone than the *WEF Perspective*, but careful reading of both documents will also show that there is a good degree of coincidence in relation to the Evangelical convictions even on points wherein there is divergence with the Roman Catholic positions.

In critical areas of the world where dialogue between Evangelicals and Roman Catholics about mission would be most necessary, places such as Latin America and Latin Europe, there has not been much activity, or even willingness by either of the two sides to pursue such dialogue. The *ERCDOM Report* was translated officially into Spanish and published by the General Secretary of the Latin American Theological Fraternity,⁸ but I have not seen any review or reference to it from Catholic sources in Spain or Latin America. Moreover, the language and tone of the documents from the Pope and the Bishops of CELAM in Santo Domingo (1992) were far from the language and tone of the *ERCDOM Report*, and they have in fact gone backwards in comparison with the documents from the Bishops' assemblies held in Medellin (1968) and even Puebla (1979).

Evangelical reactions from Spain and Latin America to the *ERCDOM Report* have been rather scarce. ERCDOM may well have been a dialogue of the more progressive and irenic sectors of both camps, a point that should not be overlooked in a dialogue between Roman Catholics and WEF. These facts point to the absence of a clear organic relationship between theologians, or missiologists on the one hand and church officials and mission executives on the other. This is not difficult to detect in the Evangelical camp. However, the outcome of the Report from the ERCDOM dialogue in Latin America may be pointing

⁶ 6. Basil Meeking and John Stott, *The Evangelical-Roman Catholic Dialogue on Mission 1977–1984 A Report* (Grand Rapids-Exeter: Eerdmans-Paternoster, 1986), p. 29.

⁷ 7. I will refer to this document as the *WEF Perspective*.

⁸ 8. Dr. C. René Padilla translated and published the document *Diálogo sobre la misión* (Grand Rapids – Buenos Aires: Nueva Creación, 1988).

to a similar situation among Roman Catholics. The question remains of how the findings of this type of dialogue can influence leadership at decision making levels. We might say that dialogue and conversation have cooled off in the nineties. A quick review of Evangelical periodicals such as *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, *The Evangelical Quarterly* and *Evangelical Review of Theology* shows practically no commentary, response or even notice of the Encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*.

A development taking place within the GCOWE and the AD2000 movements is worth noticing here. Because these missionary organizations emphasize pragmatic evangelism among unreached peoples, the question of their attitude toward Roman Catholics has been debated. Those who champion a strategic concentration on the unreached consider that missionary effort should not go to those who already call themselves Christian, but to those that have never heard the gospel. The practical task of defining who are the unreached requires a decision in relation to non-Evangelical Protestants, Roman Catholics and Orthodox Christians. Thus, for instance, David Barrett includes these Christians in his statistical bank and publications, as people who are already evangelized. Ralph Winter holds the same position. This sector of Evangelicals could be expected to be more active in dialogue with Catholics, but that has not been the case.⁹

EVANGELICAL CONVICTIONS AND MISSIONARY DYNAMISM

One does not need to be an Evangelical, or even a Protestant in order to acknowledge the facts of mission history. Latourette, the classic historian of missions, finds that during the 19th and 20th centuries, missionary vitality in the Protestant world bore the marks of the Evangelical ethos.¹⁰ The Protestant missionary movement was born from the ranks of Pietism in central Europe and from the Spiritual Awakenings in the 19th century English speaking world. For Latourette, missionary activity usually stems from spiritual vitality and he submits that the vital minorities of protestants in Europe are mainly from a 'puritan-pietistic-evangelical tradition'. Growth outside Europe corresponds to the same stream, 'This means that world protestantism tends increasingly to have a puritan-pietistic-evangelical stance.'¹¹

In choosing these three terms: 'puritan', 'pietistic' and 'evangelical', Latourette offers a description of the kind of evangelicalism which has kept the initiative in missionary activity in the world. We may look at these terms from a missiological perspective which includes their theological content, as well as their sociological and methodological components. Thus we find in them the ethos of a movement which emphasizes individual conversion and belief followed by moral transformation, which reacts against formal religiosity bred by sacramentalism, and which creates structures that allow rank and file Christians to take part in the missionary activities of the church.

There are Evangelical distinctives that find expression in an Evangelical perspective on mission. However, the task of defining Evangelical distinctives is awesome, due to the variety of positions and emphasis we find in communities such as those linked by the World Evangelical Fellowship. Let us also keep in mind that we cannot place as

⁹ 9. For a critical assessment from a 'loving critic' of this sector see E. Michael Jaffarian, 'World Evangelization by A.D. 2000: Will we make it?' *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, (Jan. 1994), pp. 18-28.

¹⁰ 10. Kenneth Scott Latourette, *History of the Expansion of Christianity*, Vol. 7, 'Advance through storm'. In this final volume of his classical history Latourette provides the (continued) basis for my statement and for his own statement I am quoting below.

¹¹ 11. Latourette, *Desafío a los protestantes*, (Buenos Aires: La Aurora, 1957), p. 78.

distinctives a set of doctrinal points only, because there is as well an Evangelical ethos that may be defined by the other two terms Latourette associates with Evangelical: puritan and pietistic. Such ethos involves piety, self-image, personal and social ethics, all of which permeate missionary practice.

Evangelical distinctives are well expressed in documents such as the *Lausanne Covenant*, the *ERCDOM Report*, and in the *WEF Perspectives*. From them it is possible to identify a set of convictions which are closely interrelated, providing a theological rationale that undergirds the missionary dynamism of Evangelicals. The seriousness with which they take the biblical imperative for mission relates to their belief in the supreme authority of Scriptures as a source of knowledge of God and a guide to Christian living. This makes Bible translation a key aspect of Evangelical missionary practice. Missionary zeal comes from due regard to the majesty of Jesus Christ both as incarnate God and Lord and as the Saviour of sinful humanity; he is also the centre of their message. Insistence on the need for personal response to the saving work of Jesus Christ accounts for their insistence on conversion as well as involvement in mission. Flexibility of structures for participation of all believers in mission expresses openness to the prompting of the Holy Spirit whose Lordship is also acknowledged. Even without a clearly defined ecclesiology there is conviction about the importance of the Christian community for spiritual nourishment, fellowship and growth. McGrath emphasizes the cohesiveness of Evangelical doctrines and convictions around a Christological core with a missionary thrust, 'Evangelism makes little sense unless there is a real and passionate conviction concerning the uniqueness of Christ, his atoning work on the cross and the need for a personal response of faith from those who hear the Gospel message.'¹²

There is a good degree of correspondence between this list of distinctives and the Statement of Faith of the WEF. The same points appear, in a different order, in the evangelical affirmations stated in the *ERCDOM Report*. Some of them, more explicitly related to mission are found in the section concerning 'The Nature of Mission'. I will refer to some of these Evangelical distinctives as I comment on what has happened since the time in which the above documents were published.

GOD'S MISSION IN ALL OF SCRIPTURE

Because Evangelicals have the highest regard for the Word of God they see the Bible as the norm for faith and practice. It is therefore the norm for our way of thinking and acting in mission. The *WEF Perspective* adopts the statement of the *Lausanne Covenant* about the Bible, and the *ERCDOM Report* shows just how much agreement there is as Evangelicals and Catholics look today at the Scriptures as the Basis for Mission: 'We together affirm the universality of God's purposes ...' The Old and New Testaments are the common point of reference to affirm also that 'mission arises from the self-giving love of the triune God himself and from his eternal purpose'. There is agreement also about the fact that 'the arrival of the messianic Kingdom through Jesus necessitates the announcement of the Good News, the summons to repentance and faith, and the gathering together of the people of God'.

This effort to find the missionary imperative in the great lines of God's revelation in both Testaments is part of an ongoing rediscovery of the missionary theme that runs through the Bible. Here we come to a point Evangelicals must acknowledge: they themselves have a long way to go in terms of deepening their understanding of the biblical basis of mission, in order to establish its validity not on isolated sayings but on the general

¹² 12. McGrath, op. cit., p. 164.

thrust of biblical teaching. As an Evangelical from Latin America, I have found especially significant the fact that Catholic scholars have produced books that have become standard works in the field of the biblical basis of mission. The Spanish translation of Senior-StuhlmueLLer¹³ is now a textbook in many evangelical seminaries across Latin America, simply because there is no Evangelical work of the same scope. South African missiologist David Bosch referred to this reality in an eloquent comment, 'One might even say that by and large, Catholic biblical scholars are currently taking the missionary dimension of Scripture more seriously than their Protestant counterparts.'¹⁴

In the *WEF Perspective* there is also a note of self-criticism about this point: 'We must acknowledge that often we have also set our evangelical traditions above Scripture. In many instances our lip service to biblical authority contradicts the predominant place we give to our denominational and historical baggage.' With this note comes also an important commitment to enter into a global inter-Evangelical dialogue to better understand the biblical teaching on missions 'The time has come for evangelicals around the world to work together in a contextual hermeneutics that will benefit from the rich expressions of evangelical faith that are now taking root in so many nations and cultures.' This call actually points to a principle that has been at work in the development of Evangelical missiology in recent decades, both in the WEF and in the Lausanne movement. It is the principle of a return to Scripture in a search for the deepening of belief and correction of practice. The search for a more holistic concept of mission, for a more comprehensive Christology and for a more dynamic Pneumatology, has been based on serious work in the biblical text, because Evangelicals have no higher authority than Scripture when they come to theological definition.

Some of the more difficult dialogues and debates within the Evangelical movement are related to the corrective role of Scripture in relation to missionary practice. We have an example of this in relation to the missionary strategy known as 'Spiritual Warfare' that has developed in relation to the Church Growth movement and has been promoted in different parts of the world through some Evangelical agencies. At a time in which there is a resurgence of religiosity in many parts of the world, Spiritual Warfare has contributed to a renewed awareness of the spiritual dimension of the missionary task. The Lausanne Covenant had a clear reference to it, 'We believe that we are engaged in constant spiritual warfare with the principalities and powers of evil.' (LC Par. 12). However the Spiritual Warfare movement has taken extreme and confusing directions. The Lausanne Committee issued in 1993 a statement warning about this development, and recommending some antidotes:

There is a danger that we revert to think and operate on pagan worldviews or on undiscerning application of Old Testament analogies that were in fact superseded in Jesus Christ. The antidote to this is the rigorous study of the whole of Scripture always interpreting the Old Testament in the light of the New.¹⁵

The return to Scripture in Evangelical missiology, especially to the New Testament patterns, means a continual rediscovery of how mission was carried on by the pre-

¹³ 13. Donald Senior, CP and Carroll StuhlmueLLer, CP *The Biblical Foundations for Mission*, (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1983).

¹⁴ 14. David Bosch, 'Reflections on Biblical Models of Mission', in James M. Phillips and Robert T. Coote, Eds., *Toward the 21st Century in Christian Mission. Essays in honor of Gerald H. Anderson*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), p. 178.

¹⁵ 15. 'Lausanne Committee Issues Statement on Spiritual Warfare', *World Evangelization Information Service*, Press release 27 August 1992, p. 3.

Constantinian church. Sometimes the understanding of this may not give adequate regard to historical developments. This lack of historical awareness mixed with Evangelical zeal may account for some ways of doing mission that may well be labelled as proselytism. Dialogue has to make room for understanding this, as one of the joint groups working on the issue of proselytism came to acknowledge, affirming that most persons engaged in proselytism 'do so out of a genuine concern for the salvation of those whom they address'.¹⁶

On the other hand for Evangelicals there are fewer conceptual obstacles in the effort to recover the dynamism of the Scriptural patterns. In relation to the question of the laity and their participation in mission, several renewal movements such as Waldensians, Anabaptists, Pietism and Methodism were able to return to the New Testament pattern, creating structures that allowed for ministry of lay people. The same has happened with Pentecostals and Evangelicals in our century, especially in the Third World. It is for me a matter of reflection that though Catholic scholars such as Alexandre Faivre¹⁷ or Eduardo Hoornaert¹⁸ demonstrate that the laity did not appear as a separate class in the church until the middle of the third century, their discovery may come into conflict with the dogmatic developments that George Vandervelde has considered in his paper on the church.

THE CHRISTOLOGICAL CENTRE AND MODEL

McGrath has reminded us recently that the Evangelical stance is radically Christ-centered. He relates this to the high view of Scripture to which Evangelicals are committed: 'Christology and scriptural authority are inextricably linked, in that it is Scripture, and Scripture alone that brings us to the true and saving knowledge of Jesus Christ'.¹⁹ One could describe the development of evangelical missiology after Berlin 1966 as the search for a new Christological paradigm. Traditionally, the Great Commission of Jesus Christ in [Matthew 28:18](#) had been the motto of Evangelical missions, stressing the imperative of Jesus' command to go and evangelize the nations. In Berlin, John Stott started his Bible expositions with the Gospel of John and emphasized that in it we have a model for mission, 'As my Father hath sent me', as well as a missionary imperative, 'even so send I you'. Many came to agree with Stott that 'although these words represent the simplest form of the Great Commission, it is at the same time its most profound form, its most challenging and therefore its most neglected'.²⁰

The Christological paradigm of mission found in the Gospels is incarnational and is marked by a spirit of service. Its roots are in the message of prophets such as Isaiah as well as in the theological elaboration of the Christology of Paul, Peter, John and other apostolic writers. It came to be understood as a corrective to Evangelical triumphalism,

¹⁶ 16. Quoted in Cecil M. Robeck Jr. 'Mission and the Issue of Proselytism', *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, (Jan. 1996), p. 6.

¹⁷ 17. Alexandre Faivre, *The Emergence of the Laity in the Early Church*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1990).

¹⁸ 18. Eduardo Hoornaert, *The Memory of the Christian People*, (New York: Orbis Press, 1987).

¹⁹ 19. McGrath, op. cit., p. 65.

²⁰ 20. John R.W. Stott 'The Great Commission' in Carl F.H. Henry and Stanley Mooneyham, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 39.

and consequently taken very seriously by Evangelicals around the world.²¹ In the Evangelical reflection there was a significant shift in attention to the Johannine version of the Great Commission. From this came a new appreciation of the humanity of Jesus Christ and the importance of his incarnational style of mission. This also became the source for evaluation and self-criticism within the Evangelical missionary enterprise. One finds it as a theme in the Lausanne Covenant and as a hermeneutical key in several documents produced later on by the Lausanne movement and the WEF.

René Padilla has expressed well an Evangelical perspective recovered from a fresh reading of the Gospels: 'Jesus Christ is God's missionary par excellence, and he involves his followers in his mission.'²² As we find it in the Gospels, Jesus' mission includes 'fishing for the Kingdom', or, in other words, the call to conversion to Jesus Christ as the way the truth and the life. It is this conversion to Jesus which stands as the basis upon which the Christian community is formed. Mission also includes 'compassion' as a result of immersion among the multitudes. It is neither a sentimental burst of emotion nor an academic option for the poor, but definite and intentional actions of service in order to 'feed the multitude' with bread *for* life, as well as Bread *of* life. Mission includes 'confrontation' between the powers of death and the power of the Suffering Servant, and thus 'suffering' becomes a mark of Jesus' messianic mission and a result of this power struggle and of human injustice. Through creative contextual obedience Jesus' mission becomes a fertile source of inspiration, it contains the seeds of new patterns being explored today through practice and reflection, patterns such as simple lifestyle, holistic mission, the unity of the church for mission, the pattern of God's Kingdom as missiological paradigm and the spiritual conflict involved in mission.

Within the Evangelical missionary stance, the theme of *imitatio Christi* was given a missiological dimension, and one could say that in the case of Latin America there were in this process some convergences with some forms of Liberation theology. For Evangelicals, however, it is clear that biblical Christology also includes an unequivocal reference to the atoning work of Jesus Christ in the cross and the need of every person to respond to it. **There cannot be an imitation of Christ in the biblical sense without a new birth.** This may be a sudden experience or a long process, but awareness of it is very important. In response to liberation theologians who would stress the sociopolitical dimension of the death of Jesus, Padilla, for instance, accepts the truth based on examination of the texts of the Gospels that the death of Jesus was the historical outcome of the kind of life he lived, and that he suffered for the cause of justice and challenges us to do the same. But a warning is necessary, because

Unless the death of Christ is also seen as God's gracious provision of an atonement for sin, the basis for forgiveness is removed and sinners are left without the hope of justification ... salvation is by grace through faith and . . . nothing should detract from the generosity of God's mercy and love as the basis of joyful obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ.²³

Here we can appreciate better an important point of divergence between Catholics and Evangelicals that appears in the section on the biblical basis of mission in the *ERCDOM*

²¹ 21. See, for instance, C. René Padilla, Ed., *The New Face of Evangelicalism*, (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 1976); Vinay Samuel and Chris Sugden, Eds., *Sharing Jesus in the Two Thirds World*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983).

²² 22. C. René Padilla, 'Bible Studies', *Missiology*, 10(3), pp. 319–338.

²³ 23. In Vinay Samuel and Chris Sugden, Ed., *Sharing Jesus in the Two Thirds World*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), p. 28.

Report. First we find a summary of agreements and disagreements in a crisp sentence: 'While both sides affirm that the pilgrim Church is missionary by its very nature, its missionary activity is differently understood.' It goes on to explain the Vatican II definition of the Church as 'sacrament of salvation ... the sign and promise of redemption to each and every person without exception.' It then states that most Evangelicals have a contrasting position 'The Church is the beginning and anticipation of the new creation, the first born among his creatures. Though all in Adam die, not all are automatically in Christ. So life in Christ has to be received by grace with repentance, through faith. **With yearning Evangelicals plead for a response to the atoning work of Christ in his death and resurrection.** But with sorrow they know that not all who are called are chosen' (emphasis is mine). This conviction is then reflected in missionary activity: 'Evangelization is therefore the call to those outside to come as children of the Father into the fullness of eternal life in Christ by the Spirit, and into the joy of a loving community in the fellowship of the Church.'

This call to conversion is crucial for Evangelical mission. Personal encounter with Jesus Christ changes people radically and there is a component of moral transformation in this concept of conversion. As a historian observed, in the Evangelical revival of John Wesley we could see both the pessimism about human nature, that was characteristic of Calvin's biblical anthropology, and the optimism about divine grace from Evangelical Arminianism that matched it.²⁴ I would say that this balanced but tense vision has been one of the marks of Evangelical missionary and evangelistic efforts. There is power in the blood of Jesus Christ to regenerate persons by the power of the Holy Spirit. This conviction was forcefully restated in 1988 by a joint group of WEF and the Lausanne Committee:

Conversion means turning from sin in repentance to Christ in faith. Through this faith believers are forgiven and justified and adopted into the family of God's children and heirs. In the turning process, they are invited to the crucified and risen Christ by the Holy Spirit who prompts them to die to the sinful desires of their old nature and to be liberated from Satanic bondage and to become new creatures in Him. This is their passage from spiritual death to spiritual life, which Scripture calls regeneration or new birth ([John 3:5](#)).²⁵

Because mission involves frequently a transcultural action it is important to be alert against forms of evangelism and conversion that appear more as the imposition of foreign cultural patterns on the receptors of the Gospel. The Lausanne Covenant had a warning reminding us that 'Missions have all too frequently exported with the Gospel an alien culture, and churches have sometimes been in bondage to culture rather than to Scripture.' (LC Par. 10). The 'Hong Kong Call' offers a more specific reminder that 'there is a radical discontinuity in all conversions, in the sense that the convert "turns from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God" ([Acts 26:18](#)).' However, it also tries to make clear that,

conversion should not 'deculturise' the converts. They should remain members of their cultural community, and wherever possible retain the values that are not contrary to biblical revelation. In no case should the converts be forced to be 'converted' to the culture of the foreign missionary.²⁶

²⁴ 24. E. Gordon Rupp, *Principalities and Powers*, (London: Epworth Press, 1952), pp. 76–93.

²⁵ 25. 'The Hong Kong Call to Conversion', [Evangelical Review of Theology](#), 16(3), 1992, p. 264.

²⁶ 26. Id., p. [267](#).

The radical Christocentrism of Evangelicals accounts also for their stance in relation to other religions. The *WEF Perspective* uses strong language when it criticizes syncretistic practices. At Lausanne II in Manila (1989), Canon Colin Chapman, who had been a missionary among Muslims, acknowledged the fact that Evangelicals had still much to learn in their understanding of how the Bible deals with the issue of religion in general. The question has become more urgent in recent times, in view of the increase of religiosity in the West and the tension between growing pluralism on the one hand and fundamentalisms on the other, in many parts of the world. The way ahead is being opened by the work of theologians from those parts of the world where the encounter with other faiths is part of the daily life of the missionary and the Christian community. Asian and African Evangelicals are contributing to a better understanding of the uniqueness of Jesus Christ. There is firmness in their Evangelical conviction, but there is also an awareness of the dangers of Western triumphalism that may have tainted Evangelical positions in the past. Thus, for instance, Vinoth Ramachandra, an Evangelical from Sri Lanka, examines critically the missiological approach of three Asian Catholic theologians: Samartha, Pieris and Pannikar. Then he offers a careful development of orthodox Christology in dialogue with religions and modernity. From his Christology comes a position that avoids arrogance: 'This kind of theological position, which seeks a biblical balance of confidence and humility, defies classification under the customary categories of exclusivist, pluralist and inclusivist where Christian views on the world religions are concerned.'²⁷

During the most recent decade in Latin America there has been much pastoral and theological work (and very little dialogue) in the area of popular religion among both Catholics and Evangelicals. On the one hand there is the effort of the Catholic Church to understand critically the syncretistic forms of Christianity, especially among the indigenous peoples, what is now being called 'the Indian face of God'. On the other hand there is the existence of popular forms of Protestantism that have grown beyond all expectations. Any one familiar with the situation of the continent knows that the question of popular religiosity does not only have a pastoral angle but also a political one which may be the source of most serious disagreements.

A Methodist theologian who has insisted on affirming his Evangelical stance, José Míguez Bonino, has written recently, challenging Latin American Evangelicals to take seriously the issue of other religions. He believes that a trinitarian Christological focus can serve as our guide. 'We must not separate the Jesus Christ of the New Testament from the Word "that was from the beginning" "with God and was God" ', and he invites us to see in human experiences the presence of that Word and that Spirit. This is not 'to "give in" to paganism but rather to confess the One "without (whom) not one thing came into being" ([John 1:3](#)).' His Evangelical warning comes then loud and clear:

It is no less true, however, that Christian theology cannot disengage the Word and the Spirit of God from the 'flesh' of the son of Mary—of his teaching, his message, his life and his death, his resurrection and lordship. It is there where we can find the marks of the authentic Word and Spirit of the God of the covenant. By the yardstick of the presence of God in Jesus one measures all presumed presence of that God in human history.²⁸

THE POWER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

²⁷ 27. Vinoth Ramachandra, *The Recovery of Mission*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), p. 275.

²⁸ 28. José Míguez Bonino, *Faces of Latin American Protestantism*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), p. 120.

Since Anglican missiologist Roland Allen, former missionary in China, published his book *The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church* in 1912, the question of a return to New Testament patterns of mission has been pursued in Protestant missiology. Allen started with methodological questions but soon found that he also had to give serious consideration to the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in mission. Actually, he was returning to a key point in the practice and theology of both Pietists and Revivalists in the history of missions. It was an important theme for Evangelical champions of missions linked to the Holiness movements, persons such as A.B. Simpson, A.J. Gordon and A.T. Pierson. In the second part of our century, the growth of the Pentecostal movement, which had had a strong missionary thrust from its inception, eventually forced the question from the missiological level, into the realm of historical and biblical studies. The Pentecostal movement in itself became a vast field for research.²⁹

The understanding of the initiative of the Holy Spirit in relation to mission has been enriched by the contributions of several Evangelical scholars. Their works provide a solid foundation for a better understanding of the Evangelical practice of mission.³⁰ In his book *Pentecost and Mission* Harry Boer reminded us that the use of the 'Great Commission' as the imperative motto for Evangelical missionary work, was actually a relatively recent development. The biblical pattern stresses the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church as the source of missionary dynamism—not a new legalism but the free and joyous expression of a renewed experience of God's grace. Here we have a better key to understand what may be the source that inspires the spontaneous missionary thrust in Evangelical missions and churches around the world.

As has already been noted, there are many types of Pentecostals within the Evangelical ranks of both the WEF and the Lausanne movement. However, the acknowledgement of their specific contributions as movements inspired and empowered by the Holy Spirit was not easy to accept by other Evangelicals. In this area we have witnessed significant advance in recent years. An important section in the *ERCDOM Report* is given to the work of the Holy Spirit in mission and it is one of the sections in which there are also significant points of agreement among Catholics and Evangelicals. At the same time it is surprising how very little space is given to the work of the Holy Spirit in the *WEF Perspective*. In contrast with this, the Summary Reports of the 1995 consultation of the WEF Theological Commission about 'Faith and Hope for the Future' are permeated by a Trinitarian affirmation and confession of faith and hope in the work of the Holy Spirit.³¹

Evangelical missions in our century, as it has been said, were more inspired by the Wesleyan revivals and the Moravian pioneers of mission than by the sixteenth century magisterial Reformers. The dynamism of missionary Protestantism came from the renewal movements of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. They had grasped truth about the Holy Spirit which now began to make sense. This, however, is not the whole picture. The readiness of men like Wesley or Zinzendorf to abandon old church structures, and their creativity in developing new structures for mission were made possible because they were open to the movement of the Spirit. Such an attitude of openness to the Spirit is what Brazilian missiologist Valdir Steuernagel calls for: 'Mission understood in pneumatological language is one act with two steps. It is first to perceive the blowing of

²⁹ 29. Murray A. Dempster, Byron D. Klaus and Douglas Petersen, Eds., *Called and Empowered: Global Mission in Pentecostal Perspective*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991).

³⁰ 30. I think of Harry R. Boer, *Pentecost and Mission*, John V. Taylor, *The Go-Between God*, several works of James D.G. Dunn, and more recently Gordon Fee, *God's Empowering Presence*.

³¹ 31. [Evangelical Review of Theology](#), 21(1), Jan. 1997, pp. 5–40.

the Spirit and the direction from which it comes. And then it is to run in the same direction to which the Spirit is blowing.’³² Some Evangelicals like myself think that discernment of the blowing of the Spirit requires an open attitude and sensitivity which acknowledge that behind those things that appear as something new and unusual, the strength and vigor of the Spirit may be at work. The act of obedience demands creativity in order to shape new structures that will be adequate instruments for missionary action in a particular historical moment.

In Pauline missionary practice we find this pattern. Paul’s Christology is the development of pastoral, doctrinal and ethical teaching that stems from the fact of Christ. Paul elaborates his Christology as he responds to the needs and the questions of churches which were born from the Spirit and which showed evidence of new life, but which had not yet articulated their belief in a meaningful way. The recipients of these letters were people who had grasped the Lordship of Christ and whose eyes had been opened by the Spirit to see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, but they did not have yet a clear Christology. What we have in the world today are churches in which people may repeat weekly the minutiae of a Christological creed but who do not have the new life in Christ that the Spirit begets. On the other hand, we have growing churches where there are the signs of the power of the Spirit at work, but where a basic theological task is necessary, along the lines of what Paul did in his ministry.

Evangelical theology has been an effort to keep both a missiological thrust and faithfulness to revealed truth. Our emphasis has not been in a continuity expressed by an earthly hierarchical institution, but in a continuity made possible by God’s Word revealed to human beings. In all the crossing of missionary frontiers, and in all the efforts at contextualization, Evangelical missiology has stressed a continuity of faithfulness to the Word. In the contemporary situation, we also need to pay heed to what Emil Brunner wrote at the middle point of our century: ‘it is not merely a question of the continuity of the word—the maintenance of the original doctrine—but also of the continuity of a life; that is life flowing from the Holy Ghost. The fellowship of Jesus lives under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit; that is the secret of its life, of its communion and of its power.’³³

I place here the question of tension between the charismatic and the institutional in relation to the initiative and authority in mission as they are found in the *ERCDOM Report*, which states that this tension exists among Catholics and Evangelicals. I think that this tension can also be traced back through the whole history of the Church. When it comes to contrasts, the Report points to the importance of hierarchical structures of teaching and pastoral authority in Roman Catholic mission activity, and, on the other hand to the Evangelical emphasis on personal experience: **‘Evangelicals have traditionally emphasized the personal right of every believer to enjoy direct access to God and the Scripture’** (emphasis mine).

We are at this point dealing with missionary activity and methodology but also with a fundamental tenet of the Evangelical position in relation to which other Evangelical convictions become functional, such as the priesthood of all believers. The personal response and direct answer to God engenders a strong sense of responsibility which is reflected in volunteerism. This is the continuous source of activists in missionary work, as well as financial supporters for it. As the *ERCDOM Report* stated: ‘For Evangelicals the agent of the proclamation is the whole community of believers who are equipped for this task by those appointed to the pastoral ministry ([Eph. 4:11-12](#))’.

³² 32. Valdir R. Stuernagel, *Obediência missionária e prática histórica. Em busca de modelos*, (Sao Paulo: ABU Editora, 1993).

³³ 33. Emil Brunner, *The Misunderstanding of the Church*, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1953), p. 47.

conviction allows for more openness to the prompting of the Holy Spirit and for more flexible structures for involvement by all members of the church. At the same time extreme forms of volunteerism and individualism account for those forms of Evangelical missionary action that may well be described as proselytism.

Conversely, as an Evangelical I find it is important to take into account what the Report goes on to state about the important role the bishops play in missionary activity within the Roman Catholic Church. Here it could also be argued that the centrality of the Eucharist in Catholic life and mission is another way through which missionary initiative remains connected with the magisterial function. At least in theory this could guarantee that missionary action does not fall into negative patterns such as proselytism. On the other hand these facts may have a bearing on the difficulties that Catholics find to mobilize their people for mission, not only for the involvement in missionary work, but also in its financial support. I find that some of the ecclesiological questions posed in Latin America by the Base Communities and by theologians such as Leonardo Boff are related to this point.

The points I have examined allow us to establish a correlation between theological convictions and evangelistic dynamism in Evangelical missionary practice. Evangelical divergences in other sections of the *ERCDOM Report* could be also used to illustrate the point I am trying to make. Some of the same convictions are more forcefully and less irenically presented in the *WEF Perspective*.

MISSIONARY VITALITY WITHOUT ECCLESIOLOGICAL DEFINITION

In recent years, Catholic missiologists have been considering more positively, and even expressing admiration for, the missionary vitality of Evangelicals. I must stress the fact that this new attitude comes particularly from **missiologists**, from those who have a grasp of the history of missions but also a concern for the continuity of missionary activity in the coming century. In this regard, one can read, for instance, the writings of Swiss missiologist Walbert Bühlman, who has done much to look at the future of mission with a long term perspective. In his books he describes, with clear but critical admiration, the Evangelical missionary zeal as something worth imitating. He points to several examples from Africa and Asia of the influence Evangelicals have exerted on Catholics in this regard. He even adds comments about Latin America, where Evangelical missions have been strongly critical of Catholicism: 'At the very least acquaintance with their lively activity has shaken us up and helped to convert us from centralism, clericalism and parochial sacramentalism through a laity with Bible in hand.'³⁴

I let American theologian Avery Dulles describe from his United States perspective the missionary passivity of Catholics in relation to the evangelistic dimension of mission. He wrote in 1992:

The majority of Catholics are not strongly inclined toward evangelization. The very term has for them a Protestant ring. The Catholic church is highly institutional, sacramental and hierarchical in its structures. Its activities are primarily directed toward the instruction and pastoral care of its own members, whose needs and demands tax the institution to its limits. Absorbed in the inner problems of the church, and occasionally in issues of peace and justice, contemporary Catholics feel relatively little responsibility for spreading the faith.³⁵

³⁴ 34. Walbert Bühlman, *The Coming of the Third Church*, (Maryknoll: Orbis Press, 1977), p. 218.

³⁵ 35. Avery Dulles, 'John Paul and the New Evangelization', *America*, Feb. 1, 1992, p. 52.

Dulles sees positive signs of a new 'shift in the Catholic tradition' and highlights the emphasis of Pope John Paul II on evangelization. For this theologian there would be mutual benefit from a dialogue between Catholics and Evangelicals, and he outlines some of those benefits. In his description of the strong points of Evangelicals in relation to evangelization, he quotes Kenneth Caycroft:

Evangelicals bring a sense of urgency and fervor to the project. They are converts and children of converts, with all the energetic zeal that that entails. Their emphasis on active personal discipleship and commitment to Sacred Scripture make Evangelicals the yeast in the dough.³⁶

For Dulles, Catholics could help Evangelicals 'to achieve a deeper grounding on tradition, a richer sacramental life, a more lively sense of worldwide community and a keener appreciation of sociopolitical responsibility.'³⁷

One could refer here to the third section of the chapter on 'The Nature of Mission' in the *ERCDOM Report*. It deals with the relationship between evangelization and socio-political activity. It points to the fact that there are controversies around this issue in both camps, and it outlines points of agreement that reflect much of recent Church history, as well as theological reflection in both camps. It is important to add at this point, that much of the reluctance of Evangelicals 'to subscribe to any inseparable unity between evangelization and the kind of socio-political involvement', as the Report describes, stems from fear of losing, or watering down convictions about the urgency of evangelism. Some of us have struggled within the Lausanne movement and the World Evangelical Fellowship for a more biblically based holistic concept of mission among Evangelicals. We have to admit, however, that the fear of some Evangelicals may not be unfounded. In fact, for many mission minded Evangelicals the worst that could happen to their churches would be that they become like the Catholics described by Father Dulles above.

Going back to Latin America where the presence of Evangelical missionaries has frequently been used by Roman Catholics as an example of unfair proselytism, we find now Catholic missiologists commending Evangelical churches for their missionary dynamism. Of course they still use the term 'sect' to refer to them. Thus for instance, observers of popular Evangelical protestantism agree that it has a remarkable ability to mobilize all members of their churches for the missionary task. 'All converts are active members who have to promote the life of the sect and work for the conversion of people who are not converted yet,'³⁸ says Swiss Passionist Roger Aubry. Though he criticizes the fact that sometimes there is more a proselytistic than an evangelistic spirit, he adds in reference to Catholics, 'we must confess that among us, in spite of the serious efforts that are being carried on, there are few lay people actively involved in the pastoral life of their parish or their Church.'³⁹

Franz Damen, a Belgian missionary in Bolivia, observes that among Evangelicals 'the task of evangelization is not assigned to a specialized personnel, because it is the *mission*

³⁶ 36. Id., p. 72.

³⁷ 37. Id.

³⁸ 38. Mons. Roger Aubry, *La misión siguiendo a Jesús por los caminos de América Latina*, (Buenos Aires: Editorial Guadalupe, 1990), p. 111.

³⁹ 39. Id. pp. 111–112.

of each member of the community.⁴⁰ He dismisses the idea that money is a factor, because the most evangelistic groups are those that have no outside connections.⁴¹ He points out that with the smallest missionary force Pentecostals, for instance, have relatively the highest rate of numerical growth. In this article Damen also refutes the idea that converts to Evangelical churches are poor passive victims of a foreign 'avalanche'. He believes Catholic rhetoric is more an expression of dismay because the privileges of religious monopoly are gone for the Catholic Church.

Spanish Jesuit missionary José L. Idígoras, who worked for decades in Perú, analysed carefully the missionary methodology of popular protestantism with its massive outdoor meetings and popular narrative preaching style. He stressed the fact that the evangelistic activity is not limited to the church building, but that groups invaded streets and squares, 'and audaciously they even go house by house and speak *opportune et importune*', adding that 'A Catholic priest, because of his training, would feel out of place in such situations.'⁴² Some of these writers, as well as some official Catholic documents, reserve the name 'church' for denominations active in the ecumenical movement, which usually do not have a strong evangelistic stance. For any church that evangelizes and grows (i.e. Baptists, Christian and Missionary Alliance, Assemblies of God, Nazarenes) the term used is 'sect'.

Evangelical churches have also grown among Hispanics in the United States. The usual 'conspiracy theory' which is applied to explain growth in Latin America, attributing it to obscure CIA designs or Rockefeller plans, cannot be used in North America. Some Catholic reactions have shown the same panic that Damen criticizes in Bolivia. Others have taken a more pastoral approach. Thus for instance, Spanish Jesuit Juan Díaz Vilar, who directs the Evangelization Department of the Northeast Hispanic Catholic Center of New York:

The sects as I see it are not a threat or an invasion, nor a fanaticism that will eventually go away. But they *are* a challenge to our pastoral focus and planning. The sects are showing us where the emptiness is in our pastoral thrust and evangelization efforts. In this sense they can be a help in alerting the Catholic Church to the need for making a move towards fashioning a church that is more personal, caring and communitarian—a Church where everyone regardless of race, ethnic background or language, can feel needed and wanted, and 'at home'.⁴³

It has been fascinating to see during the last decade in Latin America how many methods of evangelism and mission that were characteristic of Evangelicals have been adopted by Roman Catholics. There are now American Catholic missionaries in Chile preaching at noon in the open air, just as Evangelicals do. There are now charismatic priests from Spain in Peru who receive thousands of letters with requests for prayer, and they 'pray them' in TV programs. Testimonies about healings are interspersed with Evangelical 'choruses' in such a way that at some points one is not sure if it is a Catholic or an Evangelical program. A very active Catholic parish in Mexico City developed a handbook on evangelism based on the 'Four Spiritual Laws' of Campus Crusade for Christ.

⁴⁰ 40. Franz Damen, 'Las sectas: ¿avalancha o desafío?', article in the Jesuit magazine, *Cuarto Intermedio*, Cochabamba, Bolivia, May 1989, pp. 60–61.

⁴¹ 41. The usual argument about the financial side of Evangelical missionary action, in the case of Latin America, must be balanced by this observation of Damen. Also, the Catholic Church receives significant infusions of money from missionary sources in Europe and North America, besides the local sources at her disposal, as a result of historical circumstances.

⁴² 42. José Luis Idígoras S.J., *La religión, fenómeno popular*, (Lima: Ediciones Paulinas, 1991), p. 144.

⁴³ 43. Juan Diaz Vilar S.J., 'Hispanics and the Sects in the United States', *The Catholic World*, Nov–Dec 1990, p. 265.

Moving from empirical observation and methodological imitation to theological reflection I propose that there are three categories of questions we must ask for a fruitful dialogue. First, to what degree is this Evangelical missionary dynamism that Catholic missiologists now admire, and this methodological creativity they now are imitating, the direct consequence of an Evangelical theology of mission? Is it driven by the Holy Spirit? If so, what is the Spirit saying to the Roman Catholic Church? Second, in what ways are these facts challenging the Ecclesiology and the Soteriology of the Catholic positions, and conversely what are the weaknesses at this point that Evangelicals have to deal with in their theological expression and in their missionary practice? What form of ecumenism will not quench missionary zeal? Third, how is it possible to avoid a mere methodological competition, and enter in a level of dialogue that involves mutual recognition, long term missionary vision and due regard for the biblical teaching about the Church and its unity?

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Books Reviewed

Reviewed by Bradley G. Green
Robin Gill

[*Readings in Modern Theology: Britain and America*](#)

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Wolfhart Pannenberg
[*Systematic Theology Vol 2*](#)

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Book Reviews

READINGS IN MODERN THEOLOGY: BRITAIN AND AMERICA

edited by Robin Gill

Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995, 399 pp, pb name index

Reviewed by Bradley G. Green, Union University Jackson, Tennessee, USA

It can be a rather confusing time for young theological students. While most of us are trying to get a grip on two thousand years of the theological past, along comes modern theology, a whole new challenge to understand. Thus, while trying to understand and

appreciate Moses, Jesus, Paul, Origen, Augustine, Aquinas, Calvin, Luther, and Barth, we are faced with the task of wrestling with the likes of David Tracy, George Lindbeck, and David Burrell.

In light of this predicament, it is helpful when someone puts together compendiums to help us catch up. *Readings in Modern Theology: Britain and America* is just that kind of book. Gill has culled together thirty-six essays from thirty-five writers, covering a broad range of contemporary theological issues. Well-known theologians who contribute to this volume include Rosemary Radford Ruether, Gordon Kaufman, David Tracy, Sallie McFague, Colin Gunton, George A. Lindbeck, David H. Kelsey, Edward Farley, Ronald Thiemann, Stanley Hauerwas, and others.

Gill included only works written between 1984 and 1994, making the volume's contents current. Contributions consist largely of previously published journal articles, one notable exception being that excerpts from George Lindbeck's *The Nature of Doctrine* are included in the 'Christ and Postmodernism' section (the largest section of the volume).

Gill divides up the book into three parts. Part one, 'God and Creation', features three sections: 'God as Creator', 'God as Mother', and 'God as Trinity'. (No, there is no section on God as Father). Part two, 'Christ and Plurality', features three sections: 'Christ and Other Faiths', 'Christ and Postmodernism', and 'Christ and the Academy'. Part three, 'Spirit and Community', features two sections: 'The Christian Life' and 'Christian Communities'. A very helpful ten page introduction summarizes the book's contents and is an excellent place for the novice to begin.

Each section begins with bibliographic information on the contributors. Gill closes the work with a brief epilogue which offers his perspective on the issues which have been raised (and this epilogue itself provides a helpful taste of the book's contents), as well as an author index.

In short, the book is an excellent resource for many current trends in contemporary theology. Perhaps most helpful for many readers will be the section, 'Christ and Postmodernism'. 'Postmodernism' simply seems to be 'In the air', and believers do well to grasp the issues surrounding this phenomenon. George Lindbeck and David Tracy, two of North America's most significant theologians, and who both work in the area of contemporary theology (although moving in different directions), are featured in this section. Segments from George Lindbeck's *The Nature of Doctrine* are included, and three other contributors offer reviews of Lindbeck. David Tracy contributes his article, 'Theology and the Many Faces of Postmodernity', which offers his vision of the future of Christian theology.

While Gill has attempted to draw from a variety of theologians, it is clear that he has chosen contributors who generally fit in the liberal/ postliberal/postmodern theological camp. It may be that the term 'liberal' is quickly becoming outmoded. Whereas it once referred to a fairly distinct theological movement, current trends in theology, whether postliberalism, postmodernism, or whatever, seem at times somewhat difficult to include under the one term 'liberal'.

At the same time, some evangelicals are interested in embracing postmodernism to at least some degree (e.g. Stanley Grenz, Brian Walsh, and Richard Middleton). Nonetheless, probably most contributors to Gill's volume would not consider themselves 'evangelicals' in any meaningful sense (Colin Gunton and perhaps a few others might possibly be exceptions). Thomas Oden in North America would have been a worthy contributor, while someone like Alistair McGrath in Europe would have likewise been appropriate. Interaction with eminent evangelical scholars would make this volume a more comprehensive 'reader' in modern theology.

While Gill would surely concede that the volume makes no effort to include evangelicals, it is still valuable. Read the introduction and epilogue, and then begin to work through those sections which may help one to understand better an aspect of contemporary theology which is of interest, paying particular attention to the helpful section on postmodernism.

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY, VOL. 2.

by Wolfhart Pannenberg

translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley from *Systematische Theologie*, Band 2, (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht: Gottingen 1991) Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1994, xvi + 464, Hb Indexes: Subject, Name and Scripture, ISBN 0-8028-3707-7

Reviewed by Rev Dr M.J. Davidson, Baptist Theological College of Western Australia, Perth, W.A.

The second volume of W. Pannenberg's systematic theology, (translated once again by Geoffrey Bromiley), covering creation, anthropology, Christology and soteriology, further endorses his reputation as 'the greatest theological mind of our time' (Erickson).

His erudition is undisputed, extending far beyond theology in any narrow sense, to such disciplines as philosophy and science. Furthermore, his arguments draw on a vast range of thinkers from early Christian times to the present, thus providing an object lesson in the methodology of systematic theology. English readers, however, are somewhat disadvantaged by the fact that the great majority of contemporary writers cited are (understandably) German.

The grand, integrative scope of Pannenberg's thought is clear as he links intra-trinitarian relations of love to 'God's action as Creator, Sustainer, Reconciler, and Consummator of a world of creatures'. Claiming that theology must speak of creation (the free act of the triune God) in dialogue with the sciences, Pannenberg discusses the activity of the Holy Spirit in terms of a field of force, though without identifying the Spirit with the field itself. While he often speaks of the triune God in personal terms, this field theory approach, however, seems to threaten the idea of God's personal nature because of a tendency to Hegelian or panentheistic concepts.

A certain rationalising tendency also emerges when angels are described as 'natural forces that from another angle might be the object of scientific descriptions'. Theology's struggles against Darwinism are regarded as having been 'a momentous mistake'. There is discussion of the problem posed by evil in a world created good by God; ultimately, God 'stands by his responsibility for the work he has made' by 'giving up his Son to the cross'. In the material on the beginning and end of the universe, evangelicals will find little consideration of the many issues that are on their agenda.

Regarding anthropology, Pannenberg finds that the distinguishing characteristic of humans lies in their 'destiny of fellowship with God' (p. 190), while in the incarnation of the Son the relation of humans to the Creator 'finds its supreme and final realisation'. Human sin is considered as misery and alienation, but this condition can be overcome in Christ, so that humans progress to the eschatological goal of likeness to God. Once again, Pannenberg integrates major theological themes—humanity created in the image of God, Christ as God's image, and the eschaton.

There is a wealth of nuanced discussion concerning sin, original sin, guilt and responsibility. However, not all will agree that 'Adam was simply the first sinner' and thus 'the original of all of us in our sinning'. Others will look for more treatment of the variegated nature of sin as it is presented by the biblical writers.

In the present work, Pannenberg restates (with occasional revisions) his earlier positions on Christology which is to be done 'from below', not 'from above'. Concluding

that Jesus was indeed the incarnate Son, Pannenberg emphasizes 'the justification of Jesus by the Father in his resurrection'. While not accepting all biblical reports of the resurrection as historical, he argues that some 'we cannot question'. Given his adoption of critical scholarship in general, his strong affirmation of the deity of Jesus Christ may surprise some readers.

The author cuts through the complexities of ecclesiastical debate about the two natures in the incarnate Son by appeal to a fundamental insight. Since it was he who created humans originally, 'the eternal Son . . . is by no means alien to human nature'. The human and the divine are compatible in the one individual.

The resurrection of Jesus demonstrated that his death was not punishment for his own sin. Pannenberg prefers the term 'inclusive' to 'exclusive' to emphasize the participatory nature of Jesus' representation of humankind in his death, which provided expiation for the sins of others in his 'vicarious penal suffering ... of the wrath of God at sin'. The traditional term 'propitiation' could well have been employed, and the recognition of the divine wrath contrasts with Pannenberg's earlier reluctance to speak of God as needing to be reconciled with humans.

Pannenberg argues that the offer of reconciliation (his preferred category for thinking about salvation) must be accepted by people individually. Jesus' representative work does not replace us as moral agents, a point in relation to which Barth's views are critiqued. The volume concludes with a section on the gospel, which ultimately has to do with 'the saving presence of the eschatological rule of God linked to the person and history of Jesus'. He declares, 'The proclamation of the gospel ... is not merely one thing among others in the church's life. It is the basis of the church's life.'

In a work which abounds with helpful insights, attention can be directed to the author's view of Scripture. Revelatory meaning arises from historical events themselves, with nothing supernatural being added by the Holy Spirit. Also, not all statements in the Gospels are to be taken at face value. Given views like this it is somewhat surprising to find some quite extensive uncritical use of texts (especially the Fourth Gospel). Yet the fact that Scripture does get used in this way means that evangelicals will find much discussion congenial to their understanding of biblical theology.

As a theologian of the Enlightenment, Pannenberg assigns reason a vital role in demonstrating the truth of Christian belief. He wants to distance himself from a pietism which seeks to ground truth in personal experience, or which disregards historical matters as irrelevant to it. However, the question arises as to how successful and consistent he ultimately is in his enterprise of finding revelatory meaning within historical events alone. Can Lessing's ugly ditch be so easily crossed?

Despite such reservations, there is much here to enrich the systematic theologian, both in terms of content and methodology. Pannenberg's work is not easy reading, but it is certainly rewarding and always challenging. Undoubtedly, no serious theologian can afford to ignore him.

HANDBOOK OF CHRISTIAN APOLOGETICS

by Peter Kreeft and Ronald Tacelli

Crowborough, UK: Monarch Publications, 1995, Pb 406pp ISBN 1-85424-306-3

Reviewed by David Parker

According to the preface of this handy volume, the authors, who both teach philosophy at Boston College, are convinced of the truth of the Christian faith and that persuading others of this truth is the best thing one can do, especially when its immense benefits and valuable consequences are taken into account. They are also confident that 'honest

reasoning can lead any open-minded person' to the same conclusions. Hence, this handbook appeals strongly to reason and logical argument as it presents the case for orthodox Christianity over a wide range of topics in apologetics. As far as possible, each chapter adopts a consistent approach, defining the question and explaining its importance before moving on dealing with objections and their defence.

Readers who are convinced by the authors' justification of their highly 'rationalistic' method found in the opening chapter and their discussion of 'objective truth' which closes the work will be grateful for this manual. Even those who are not quite so impressed will find much useful information in summarised and tabular form; they will also find many intriguing insights which will help them understand and share their faith on issues like the existence of God, cosmology, evil, the person and work of Christ, salvation, heaven and hell and other religions. The long lists of questions for further discussion and the bibliographies attached to each chapter are also helpful features of the book.