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# Mission and Evangelism—An Ecumenical Affirmation

*World Council of Churches*

## Preface

**T**he biblical promise of a new earth and a new heaven where love, peace and justice will prevail (Ps. 85: 7–13; Isa. 32: 17–18, 65: 17–25 and Rev. 21: 1–2) invites our actions as Christians in history. The contrast of that vision with the reality of today reveals the monstrosity of human sin, the evil unleashed by the rejection of God's liberating will for humankind. Sin, alienating persons from God, neighbour and nature, is found both in individual and corporate forms, both in slavery of the human will and in social, political and economic structures of domination and dependence.

The Church is sent into the world to call people and nations to repentance, to announce forgiveness of sin and a new beginning in relations with God and with neighbours through Jesus Christ. This evangelistic calling has a new urgency today.

In a world where the number of people who have no opportunity to know the story of Jesus is growing steadily, *how necessary it is to multiply the witnessing vocation of the church!*

In a world where the majority of those who do not know Jesus are the poor of the earth, those to whom he promised the kingdom of God, *how essential it is to share with them the Good News of that kingdom!*

In a world where people are struggling for justice, freedom and liberation, often without the realization of their hopes, *how important it is to announce that God's kingdom is promised to them!*

In a world where the marginalized and the drop-outs of affluent society search desperately for comfort and identity in drugs or esoteric cults,

*how imperative it is to announce that he has come so that all may have life and may have it in all its fullness (John 10:10)!*

In a world where so many find little meaning, except in the relative security of their affluence, *how necessary it is to hear once again Jesus' invitation to discipleship, service and risk!*

In a world where so many Christians are nominal in their commitment to Jesus Christ, *how necessary it is to call them again to the fervour of their first love!*

In a world where wars and rumors of war jeopardize the present and future of humankind, where an enormous part of natural resources and people are consumed in the arms race, *how crucial it is to call the peacemakers blessed, convinced that God in Christ has broken all barriers and has reconciled the world to himself (Eph. 2:14; II Cor. 5:19)!*

This ecumenical affirmation is a challenge which the churches extend to each other to announce that God reigns, and that there is hope for a future when God will "unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth" (Eph. 1:10). Jesus is "the first and last, and the Living One" (Rev. 1: 17–18), who "is coming soon" (Rev. 22:12), who "makes all things new" (Rev. 21:5).

## The Call to Mission

1. The present ecumenical movement came into being out of the conviction of the churches that the division of Christians is a scandal and an impediment to the witness of the Church. There is a growing awareness among the churches today of the inextricable relationship between Christian unity and missionary calling, between ecumenism and evangelization. "Evangelization is the test of our ecumenical vocation."<sup>1</sup>

As "a fellowship of churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Savior, according to the Scriptures, and therefore seek to fulfil together their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and

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Holy Spirit,"<sup>2</sup> the rallying point of the World Council of Churches in the common confession of Jesus Christ. The saving ministry of the Son is understood within the action of the Holy Trinity; it was the Father who in the power of the Spirit sent Jesus Christ the Son of God incarnate, the Saviour of the whole world. The churches of the WCC are on a pilgrimage towards unity under the missionary vision of John 17:21, "that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me."<sup>3</sup>

2. Already in the Old Testament the people of Israel were looking forward to the day of peace where God's justice will prevail (Isa. 11: 1-9). Jesus came into that tradition announcing that the kingdom of God was at hand (Mark 1:15), that in him the reality of the kingdom was present (Luke 4: 15-21). God was offering this new justice to the children, to the poor, to all who labour and are heavy laden, to all those who will repent and will follow Jesus. The early Church confessed Jesus as Lord, as the highest authority at whose name every knee shall bow, who in the cross and in the resurrection has liberated in this world the power of sacrificial love.

3. Christ sent the disciples with the words: "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you" (John 20:21). The disciples of Jesus were personal witnesses of the risen Christ (I John 1: 2-3). As such they were sent—commissioned apostles to the world. Based on their testimony which is preserved in the New Testament and in the life of the Church, the Church has as one constitutive mark its being apostolic, its being sent into the world. God in Christ has equipped the Church with all gifts of the Spirit necessary for its witness. "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witness in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

4. The book of Acts tells the story of the expansion of the early Church as it fulfils its missionary vocation. The Holy Spirit came upon that small Jerusalem community on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2: 1-39), in order that through them and through others who were to believe in Christ through their word (John 17:20), the world may be healed and redeemed.

The early Church witnessed to its Risen Lord in a variety of ways, most specially in the style of life of its members. "And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved" (Acts 2:46-47). Through the persecutions suffered by the early Christians, the word spread spontaneously: "Now those who were scattered went about preaching the word" (Acts 8:4). The apostles then came to confirm the faith of those who had accepted the Word of God (Acts 8: 14-17). At other times, the word spread through more explicit and purposeful ministries. The church in Antioch organized the first missionary trip. Barnabas and Paul were sent by the church in response to the Holy Spirit (Acts 13: 1-4). Time and time again, the church was surprised by God's calling to face entirely new missionary situations (Acts 8:26; 10:17; 16: 9-10).

5. Jesus Christ was in himself the complete revelation of God's love, manifested in justice and forgiveness through all aspects of his earthly life. He completed the work of the Father. "My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work" (John 4:34). In his obedience to the Father's will, in his love for humanity, he used many ways to reveal God's love to the world: forgiving, healing, casting out demons, teaching, proclaiming, denouncing, testifying in courts, finally surrendering his life. The Church today has the same freedom to develop its mission, to respond to changing situations and circumstances. It is sent into the world, participating in that flow of love from God the Father. In that mission of love (Matt. 22:37) through all aspects of its life, the Church endeavours to witness to the full realization of God's kingdom in Jesus Christ. The Church is called, like John the Baptist, to point towards the "lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

## The Call to Proclamation and Witness

6. The mission of the Church ensues from the nature of the Church as the Body of Christ, sharing in the ministry of Christ as Mediator between God and His Creation. This mission of mediation in Christ involves two integrally related movements—one from God to Creation, and the other from

Creation to God. The Church manifests God's love for the world in Christ—through word and deed, in identification with all humanity, in loving service and joyful proclamation; the Church, in that same identification with all humanity, lifts up to God its pain and suffering, hope and aspiration, joy and thanksgiving in intercessory prayer and eucharistic worship. Any imbalance between these two directions of the mediatory movement adversely affects our ministry and mission in the world.

Only a Church fully aware of how people in the world live and feel and think can adequately fulfil either aspect of this mediatory mission. It is at this point that the Church recognizes the validity and significance of the ministry of others to the Church, in order that the Church may better understand and be in closer solidarity with the world, knowing and sharing its pains and yearnings. Only by responding attentively to others can we remove our ignorance and misunderstanding of others, and be better able to minister to them.

At the very heart of the Church's vocation in the world is the proclamation of the kingdom of God inaugurated in Jesus the Lord, crucified and risen. Through its internal life of eucharistic worship, thanksgiving, intercessory prayer, through planning for mission and evangelism, through a daily lifestyle of solidarity with the poor, through advocacy even to confrontation with the powers that oppress human beings, the churches are trying to fulfil this evangelistic vocation.

7. The starting point of our proclamation is Christ and Christ crucified. "We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles" (I Cor. 1:23). The Good News handed on to the Church is that God's grace was in Jesus Christ, who "though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich" (II Cor. 8:9).

Following human wisdom, the wise men from the Orient who were looking for the child went to the palace of King Herod. They did not know that "there was no place for him in the inn" and that he was born in a manger, poor among the poor. He even went so far in his identification with the poverty of humankind that his family was obliged to take the route of political refugee to Egypt. He was raised as a worker, came proclaiming God's caring for the poor, announced blessedness for them, sided with the underprivileged, confronted the powerful and went to the cross to open up a new life for humankind. As his disciples, we announce his solidarity with all the downtrodden and marginalized. Those who are considered to be nothing are precious in God's eyes (I Cor. 1: 26-31). To believe in Jesus the King is to accept his undeserved grace and enter with him into the Kingdom, taking sides with the poor struggling to overcome poverty. Both those who announce Jesus as the servant King and those who accept this announcement and respond to it are invited to enter with him daily in identification and participation with the poor of the earth.

With the Apostle Paul and all Christian churches, we confess Christ Jesus, "who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2: 6-11).

8. But Christ's identification with humanity went even more deeply, and while nailed on the cross accused as a political criminal, he took upon himself the guilt even of those who crucified him. "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). The Christian confession reads, "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (II Cor. 5:21). The cross is the place of the decisive battle between the powers of evil and the love of God. It uncovers the lostness of the world, the magnitude of human sinfulness, the tragedy of human alienation. The total self-surrendering of Christ reveals the immeasurable depth of God's love for the world (John 3:16).

On this same cross, Jesus was glorified. Here God the Father glorified the Son of man, and in so doing confirmed Jesus as the Son of God (John 13:31). "The early Christians used many analogies to describe what they had experienced and what they believed had happened. The most striking picture is that of a sacrificed lamb, slaughtered but yet living, sharing the throne, which symbolized the heart of all power and sovereignty, with the living God himself."<sup>4</sup>

It is this Jesus that the Church proclaims as the very life of the world because on the cross he gave his own life for all that all may live. In him misery, sin and death are defeated once forever. They cannot be accepted as having final power over human life. In him there is abundant life, life eternal. The Church proclaims Jesus, risen from the dead. Through the resurrection, God vindicates Jesus, and opens up a new period of missionary obedience until he comes again (Acts 1: 11). The power of the risen and crucified Christ is now released. It is the new birth to a new life, because as he took our predicament on the cross, he also took us into a new life in his resurrection. "When anyone is united to Christ, there is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come" (II Cor. 5:17).

Evangelism calls people to look towards that Jesus and commit their life to him, to enter into the kingdom whose king has come in the powerless child of Bethlehem, in the murdered one on the cross.

## Ecumenical Convictions

9. In the ecumenical discussions and experience, churches with their diverse confessions and traditions and in their various expressions as parishes, monastic communities, religious orders, etc., have learned to recognize each other as participants in the one worldwide missionary movement. Thus, together, they can affirm an ecumenical perception of Christian mission expressed in the following convictions under which they covenant to work for the kingdom of God.

### 1. Conversion

10. The proclamation of the Gospel includes an invitation to recognize and accept in a personal decision the saving lordship of Christ. It is the announcement of a personal encounter, mediated by the Holy Spirit, with the living Christ, receiving his forgiveness and making a personal acceptance of the call to discipleship and a life of service. God addresses himself specifically to each of his children, as well as to the whole human race. Each person is entitled to hear the Good News. Many social forces today press for conformity and passivity. Masses of poor people have been deprived of their right to decide about their lives and the life of their society. While anonymity and marginalization seem to reduce the possibilities for personal decisions to a minimum, God as Father knows each one of his children and calls each of them to make a fundamental personal act of allegiance to him and his kingdom in the fellowship of his people.

11. While the basic experience of conversion is the same, the awareness of an encounter with God revealed in Christ, the concrete occasion of this experience and the actual shape of the same differs in terms of our personal situation. The calling is to specific changes, to renounce evidences of the domination of sin in our lives and to accept responsibilities in terms of God's love for our neighbour. John the Baptist said very specifically to the soldiers what they should do; Jesus did not hesitate to indicate to the young ruler that his wealth was the obstacle to his discipleship.

Conversion happens in the midst of our historical reality and incorporates the totality of our life, because God's love is concerned with that totality. Jesus' call is an invitation to follow him joyfully, to participate in his servant body, to share with him in the struggle to overcome sin, poverty and death.

12. The importance of this decision is highlighted by the fact that God himself through his Holy Spirit helps the acceptance of his offering of fellowship. The New Testament calls this a new birth (John 3:3). It is also called conversion, metanoia, total transformation of our attitudes and styles of life. Conversion as a dynamic and ongoing process "involves a turning *from* and a turning *to*. It always demands reconciliation, a new relationship both with God and with others. It involves leaving our old security behind (Matt. 16:24) and putting ourselves at risk in a life of faith."<sup>5</sup> It is "conversion *from* a life characterized by sin, separation from God, submission to evil and the unfulfilled potential of God's image, *to* a new life characterized by the forgiveness of sins, obedience to the commands of God, renewed fellowship with God in Trinity, growth in the restoration of the divine image and the realization . . . of the love of Christ. . . ."<sup>6</sup>

The call to conversion, as a call to repentance and obedience, should also be addressed to nations, groups and families. To proclaim the need to change from war to peace, from injustice to justice, from racism to solidarity, from hate to love is a witness rendered to Jesus Christ and to his king-

dom. The prophets of the Old Testament addressed themselves constantly to the collective conscience of the people of Israel calling the rulers and the people to repentance and to renewal of the covenant.

13. Many of those who are attracted to Christ are put off by what they see in the life of the churches as well as in individual Christians. How many of the millions of people in the world who are not confessing Jesus Christ have rejected him because of what they saw in the lives of Christians! Thus the call to conversion should begin with the repentance of those who do the calling, who issue the invitation. Baptism in itself is a unique act, the covenant that Christians no longer belong to themselves but have been bought forever with the blood of Christ and belong to God. But the experience of baptism should be constantly re-enacted by daily dying with Christ to sin, to themselves and to the world and rising again with him into the servant body of Christ to become a blessing for the surrounding community.

The experience of conversion gives meaning to people in all stages of life, endurance to resist oppression, and assurance that even death has no final power over human life because God in Christ has already taken our life with him, a life that is "hidden with Christ in God" (Col. 3:3).

### 2. The Gospel to All Realms of Life

14. In the Bible, religious life was never limited to the temple or isolated from daily life (Hos. 6: 4-6; Isa. 58: 6-7). The teaching of Jesus on the kingdom of God is a clear reference to God's loving lordship over all human history. We cannot limit our witness to a supposedly private area of life. The lordship of Christ is to be proclaimed to all realms of life. In the Great Commission, Jesus said to his disciples: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you. And lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age" (Matt. 28: 19-20). The Good News of the kingdom is a challenge to the structures of society (Eph. 3: 9-10; 6:12) as well as a call to individuals to repent. "If salvation from sin through divine forgiveness is to be truly and fully personal, it must express itself in the renewal of these relations and structures. Such renewal is not merely a consequence but an essential element of the conversion of whole human beings."<sup>7</sup>

15. "The Evangelistic Witness is directed towards all of the *ktisis* (creation) which groans and travails in search of adoption and redemption. . . . The transfiguring power of the Holy Trinity is meant to reach into every nook and cranny of our national life. . . . The Evangelistic Witness will also speak to the structures of this world; its economic, political, and societal institutions. . . . We must re-learn the patristic lesson that the Church is the mouth and voice of the poor and the oppressed in the presence of the powers that be. In our own way we must learn once again 'how to speak to the ear of the King,' on the people's behalf . . . Christ was sent for no lesser purpose than bringing the world into the life of God."<sup>8</sup>

16. In the fulfilment of its vocation, the Church is called *to announce* Good News in Jesus Christ, forgiveness, hope, a new heaven and a new earth; *to denounce* powers and principalities, sin and injustice; *to console* the widows and orphans, healing, restoring the brokenhearted; and *to celebrate* life in the midst of death. In carrying out these tasks, churches may meet limitations, constraints, even persecution from prevailing powers which pretend to have final authority over the life and destiny of people.

17. In some countries there is pressure to limit religion to the private life of the believer—to assert that freedom to believe should be enough. The Christian faith challenges that assumption. The Church claims the right and the duty to exist publicly—visibly—and to address itself openly to issues of human concern. "Confessing Christ *today* means that the Spirit makes us struggle with . . . sin and forgiveness, power and powerlessness, exploitation and misery, the universal search for identity, the widespread loss of Christian motivation, and the spiritual longings of those who have not heard Christ's name. It means that we are in communion with the prophets who announced God's will and promise for humankind and society, with the martyrs who sealed their confession with suffering and death, and also with the doubtful who can only whisper their confession of the Name."<sup>9</sup>

18. The realm of science and technology deserves particular attention today. The everyday life of most children, women and men, whether rich or poor, is affected by the avalanche of scientific discoveries. Pharmaceutical science has revolutionized sexual behaviour. Increasingly sophisticated computers solve problems in seconds for which formerly a whole lifetime was needed; at the same time they become a means of invading the privacy of millions of people. Nuclear power threatens the survival of life on this planet, while at the same time it provides a new source of energy. Biological research stands at the awesome frontier of interference with the genetic code which could—for better or for worse—change the whole human species. Scientists are, therefore, seeking ethical guidance. Behind the questions as to right or wrong decisions and attitudes, however, there are ultimate theological questions: what is the meaning of human existence? the goal of history? the true reality within and beyond what can be tested and quantified empirically? The ethical questions arise out of a quest for a new world view, a faith.

19. The biblical stories and ancient creeds do furnish precious insights for witnessing to the Gospel in the scientific world. Can theologians, however, with these insights, help scientists achieve responsible action in genetic engineering or nuclear physics? It would hardly seem possible so long as the great communication gap between these two groups persists. Those directly involved in and affected by scientific research can best discern and explicate the insights of Christian faith in terms of specific ethical positions.

Christian witness will point towards Jesus Christ in whom real humanity is revealed and who is in God's wisdom the centre of all creation, the "head over all things" (Eph. 1:10, 22f.). This witness will show the glory and the humility of human stewardship on this earth.

### 3. The Church and Its Unity in God's Mission

20. To receive the message of the kingdom of God is to be incorporated into the body of Christ, the Church, the author and sustainer of which is the Holy Spirit. The churches are to be a sign for the world. They are to intercede as he did, to serve as he did. Thus Christian mission is the action of the body of Christ in the history of humankind—a continuation of Pentecost. Those who through conversion and baptism accept the Gospel of Jesus partake in the life of the body of Christ and participate in an historical tradition. Sadly there are many betrayals of this high calling in the history of the churches. Many who are attracted to the vision of the kingdom find it difficult to be attracted to the concrete reality of the Church. They are invited to join in a continual process of renewal of the churches. "The challenge facing the churches is not that the modern world is unconcerned about their evangelistic message, but rather whether they are so renewed in their life and thought that they become a living witness to the integrity of the Gospel. The evangelizing churches need themselves to receive the Good News and to let the Holy Spirit remake their life when and how he wills."<sup>10</sup>

21. The celebration of the eucharist is the place for the renewal of the missionary conviction at the heart of every congregation. According to the Apostle Paul, the celebration of the eucharist is in itself a "proclamation of the death of the Lord until he comes" (I Cor. 11:26). "In such ways God feeds his people as they celebrate the mystery of the Eucharist so that they may confess in word and deed that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."<sup>11</sup>

The eucharist is bread for a missionary people. We acknowledge with deep sorrow the fact that Christians do not join together at the Lord's table. This contradicts God's will and impoverishes the body of Christ. The credibility of our Christian witness is at stake.

22. Christians are called to work for the renewal and transformation of the churches. Today there are many signs of the work of the Holy Spirit in such a renewal. The house gatherings of the Church in China or the Basic Ecclesial Communities in Latin America, the liturgical renewal, biblical renewal, the revival of the monastic vocation, the charismatic movement, are indications of the renewal possibilities of the Church of Jesus Christ.

23. In the announcement to the world of the reconciliation in Jesus Christ, churches are called to unite. Faced with the challenge and threat of the world, the churches often unite to defend common positions. But common witness should be the natural consequence of their unity with Christ in his

mission. The ecumenical experience has discovered the reality of a deep spiritual unity. The common recognition of the authority of the Bible and of the creeds of the ancient Church and a growing convergence in doctrinal affirmations should allow the churches not only to affirm together the fundamentals of the Christian faith, but also to proclaim together the Good News of Jesus Christ to the world. In solidarity, churches are helping each other in their respective witness before the world. In the same solidarity, they should share their spiritual and material resources to announce together and clearly their common hope and common calling.

24. "Often it is socially and politically more difficult to witness together since the powers of the world promote division. In such situations common witness is particularly precious and Christ-like. Witness that dares to be common is a powerful sign of unity coming directly and visibly from Christ and a glimpse of his kingdom."<sup>12</sup>

The impulse for common witness comes from the depth of our faith. "Its urgency is underlined when we realize the seriousness of the human predicament and the tremendous task waiting for the churches at present."<sup>13</sup>

25. It is at the heart of Christian mission to foster the multiplication of local congregations in every human community. The planting of the seed of the Gospel will bring forward a people gathered around the Word and sacraments and called to announce God's revealed purpose.

Thanks to the faithful witness of disciples through the ages, churches have sprung up in practically every country. This task of sowing the seed needs to be continued until there is, in every human community, a cell of the kingdom, a church confessing Jesus Christ and in his name serving his people. The building up of the Church in every place is essential to the Gospel. The vicarious work of Christ demands the presence of a vicarious people. A vital instrument for the fulfilment of the missionary vocation of the Church is the local congregation.

26. The planting of the Church in different cultures demands a positive attitude towards inculturation of the Gospel. Ancient churches, through centuries of intimate relations with the cultures and aspirations of their people have proved the powerful witnessing character of this rooting of the churches in the national soil. "Inculturation has its source and inspiration in the mystery of the Incarnation. The Word was made flesh. Here flesh means the fully concrete, human and created reality that Jesus was. Inculturation, therefore, becomes another way of describing Christian mission. If proclamation sees mission in the perspective of the Word to be proclaimed, inculturation sees mission in the perspective of the flesh, or concrete embodiment, which the Word assumes in a particular individual, community, institution or culture."<sup>14</sup>

Inculturation should not be understood merely as intellectual research; it occurs when Christians express their faith in the symbols and images of their respective culture. The best way to stimulate the process of inculturation is to participate in the struggle of the less privileged for their liberation. Solidarity is the best teacher of common cultural values.

27. This growing cultural diversity could create some difficulties. In our attempt to express the catholicity of the Church we may lose the sense of its unity. But the unity we look for is not uniformity but the multiple expression of a common faith and a common mission.

"We have found this confession of Christ out of our various cultural contexts to be not only a mutually inspiring, but also a mutually corrective exchange. Without this sharing our individual affirmations would gradually become poorer and narrower. We need each other to regain the lost dimensions of confessing Christ and to discover dimensions unknown to us before. Sharing in this way, we are all changed and our cultures are transformed."<sup>15</sup>

The vision of nations coming from the East, the West, the North and the South to sit at the final banquet of the kingdom should always be before us in our missionary endeavour.

### 4. Mission in Christ's Way

28. "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you" (John 20:21). The self-emptying of the servant who lived among the people, sharing in their hopes and sufferings, giving his life on the cross for all humanity—this was Christ's way of proclaiming the Good News, and as disciples we are sum-

moned to follow the same way. "A servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him" (John 13:16).

Our obedience in mission should be patterned on the ministry and teaching of Jesus. He gave his love and his time to all people. He praised the widow who gave her last coin to the temple; he received Nicodemus during the night; he called Matthew to the apostolate; he visited Zacchaeus in his home; he gave himself in a special way to the poor, consoling, affirming and challenging them. He spent long hours in prayer and lived in dependence on and willing obedience to God's will.

An imperialistic crusader's spirit was foreign to him. Churches are free to choose the ways they consider best to announce the Gospel to different people in different circumstances. But these options are never neutral. Every methodology illustrates or betrays the Gospel we announce. In all communications of the Gospel, power must be subordinate to love.

29. Our societies are undergoing a significant and rapid change under the impact of new communication technologies and their applications. We are entering the age of the information society, characterized by an ever increasing media presence in all relationships, both interpersonal and inter-social. Christians need to re-think critically their responsibility for all communication processes and re-define the values of Christian communications. In the use of all new media options, the communicating church must ensure that these instruments of communication are not masters, but servants in the proclaiming of the kingdom of God and its values. As servants, the new media options, kept within their own limits, will help to liberate societies from communication bondage and will place tools in the hands of communities for witnessing to Jesus Christ.

**30. Evangelism happens in terms of interpersonal relations when the Holy Spirit quickens to faith. Through sharing the pains and joys of life, indentifying with people, the Gospel is understood and communicated.**

**Often, the primary confessors are precisely the non-publicized, unsentational people who gather together steadfastly in small caring communities, whose life prompts the question: "What is the source of the meaning of your life? What is the power of your powerlessness?", giving the occasion to name *the Name*. Shared experiences reveal how often Christ is confessed in the very silence of a prison cell or of a restricted but serving, waiting, praying church.**

**Mission calls for a serving church in every land, a church which is willing to be marked with the stigmata (nailmarks) of the crucified and risen Lord. In this way the church will show that it belongs to that movement of God's love shown in Christ who went to the periphery of life. Dying outside the gates of the city (Heb. 13: 12) he is the high priest offering himself for the salvation of the world. Outside the city gates the message of a self-giving, sharing love is truly proclaimed, here the Church renews its vocation to be the body of Christ in joyful fellowship with its risen Lord (1 John 3:16).**

## 5. Good News to the Poor

31. There is a new awareness of the growing gap between wealth and poverty among the nations and inside each nation. It is a cruel reality that the number of people who do not reach the material level for a normal human life is growing steadily. An increasing number of people find themselves marginalized, second-class citizens unable to control their own destiny and unable to understand what is happening around them. Racism, powerlessness, solitude, breaking of family and community ties are new evidences of the marginalization that comes under the category of poverty.

32. There is also a tragic coincidence that most of the world's poor have not heard the Good News of the Gospel of Jesus Christ; or they could not receive it, because it was not recognized as Good News in the way in which it was brought. This is a double injustice: they are victims of the oppression of an unjust economic order or an unjust political distribution of power, and at the same time they are deprived of the knowledge of God's special care for them. To announce the Good News to the poor is to begin to render the justice due to them. The Church of Jesus Christ is called to preach the Good News to the poor following the example of its Lord who was incarnated as poor, who lived as one among them and gave to them the promise of the kingdom of God. Jesus looked at the multitudes with compassion. He recognized the poor as those who were sinned against, victims of both personal and structural sin.

Out of this deep awareness came both his solidarity and his calling to them (Matt. 11: 28). His calling was a personalized one. He invited them to come to him, to receive forgiveness of sins and to assume a task. He called them to follow him, because his love incorporated his respect for them as people created by God with freedom to respond. He called them to exercise this responsibility towards God, neighbours and their own lives. The proclamation of the Gospel among the poor is a sign of the messianic kingdom and a priority criterion by which to judge the validity of our missionary engagement today.

33. This new awareness is an invitation to re-think priorities and lifestyles both in the local church and in the worldwide missionary endeavour. Of course, churches and Christians find themselves in very different contexts: some in very wealthy settings where the experience of poverty as it is known to millions in the world today is practically unknown, or in egalitarian societies where the basic needs of life seem to be assured for almost everybody, to situations of extreme poverty. But the consciousness of the global nature of poverty and exploitation in the world today, the knowledge of the interdependence between nations and the understanding of the international missionary responsibility of the Church—all invite, in fact oblige, every church and every Christian to think of ways and means to share the Good News with the poor of today. An objective look at the life of every society, even the most affluent and those which are, theoretically, more just, will show the reality of the poor today in the marginalized, the drop-outs who cannot cope with modern society, the prisoners of conscience, the dissidents. All of them are waiting for a cup of cold water or for a visit in the name of Christ. Churches are learning afresh through the poor of the earth to overcome the old dichotomies between evangelism and social action. The "spiritual Gospel" and "material Gospel" were in Jesus one Gospel.

34. There is no evangelism without solidarity; there is no Christian solidarity that does not involve sharing the knowledge of the kingdom which is God's promise to the poor of the earth. There is here a double credibility test: A proclamation that does not hold forth the promises of the justice of the kingdom to the poor of the earth is a caricature of the Gospel; but Christian participation in the struggles for justice which does not point towards the promises of the kingdom also makes a caricature of a Christian understanding of justice.

A growing consensus among Christians today speaks of God's preferential option for the poor.<sup>16</sup> We have there a valid yardstick to apply to our lives as individual Christians, local congregations and as missionary people of God in the world.

35. This concentration point, God's preferential option for the poor, raises the question of the Gospel for all those who objectively are not poor or do not consider themselves as such. It is a clear Christian conviction that God wants all human beings to be saved and to come to the knowledge of truth, but we know that, while God's purpose is for the salvation of all, he has worked historically through the people of Israel and through the incarnation of his own son Jesus Christ. While his purpose is universal, his action is always particular. What we are learning anew today is that God works through the downtrodden, the persecuted, the poor of the earth. And from there, he is calling all humanity to follow him. "If any one would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Matt. 16:24).

For all of us, the invitation is clear: to follow Jesus in identification and sharing with the weak, marginalized and poor of the world, because in them we encounter him. Knowing from the Gospel and from historical experience that to be rich is to risk forfeiting the kingdom, and knowing how close the links are, in today's world, between the abundance of some and the needs of others, Christians are challenged to follow him, surrendering all they are and have to the kingdom, to a struggle that commits us against all injustice, against all want. The preferential option for the poor, instead of discriminating against all other human beings, is, on the contrary, a guideline for the priorities and behaviour of all Christians everywhere, pointing to the values around which we should organize our lives and the struggle in which we should put our energy.

36. There is a long experience in the Church of voluntary poverty, people who in obedience to their Christian calling cast aside all their belongings, make their own the fate of the poor of the earth, becoming one of them

and living among them. Voluntary poverty has always been recognized as a source of spiritual inspiration, of insight into the heart of the Gospel.

Today we are gratefully surprised, as churches are growing among the poor of the earth, by the insight and perspective of the Gospel coming from the communities of the poor. They are discovering dimensions of the Gospel which have long been forgotten by the Church. The poor of the earth are reading reality from the other side, from the side of those who do not get the attention of the history books written by the conquerors, but who surely get God's attention in the book of life. Living with the poor and understanding the Bible from their perspective helps to discover the particular caring with which God both in the Old and in the New Testament thinks of the marginalized, the downtrodden and the deprived. We realize that the poor to whom Jesus promised the kingdom of God are blessed in their longing for justice and in their hope for liberation. They are both subjects and bearers of the Good News; they have the right and the duty to announce the Gospel not only among themselves, but also to all other sectors of the human family.

Churches of the poor are spreading the liberating Gospel of Jesus Christ in almost every corner of the earth. The richness and freshness of their experience is an inspiration and blessing to churches with a centuries-old history. The centres of the missionary expansion of the Church are moving from the North to the South. God is working through the poor of the earth to awaken the consciousness of humanity to his call for repentance, for justice and for love.

## 6. Mission in and to Six Continents

37. Everywhere the churches are in missionary situations. Even in countries where the churches have been active for centuries we see life organized today without reference to Christian values, a growth of secularism understood as the absence of any final meaning. The churches have lost vital contact with the workers and the youth and many others. This situation is so urgent that it commands priority attention of the ecumenical movement. The movement of migrants and political refugees brings the missionary frontier to the doorstep of every parish. The Christian affirmations on the worldwide missionary responsibility of the Church will be credible if they are authenticated by a serious missionary engagement at home.

As the world becomes smaller, it is possible even for Christians living far away to be aware of and inspired by faithful missionary engagement in a local situation. Of special importance today is the expression of solidarity among the churches crossing political frontiers and the symbolic actions of obedience of one part of the body of Christ that enhance the missionary work of other sectors of the Church. So, for example, while programmes related to the elimination of racism may be seen as problems for some churches, such programmes have become, for other churches, a sign of solidarity, an opportunity for witness and a test of Christian authenticity.

Every local congregation needs the awareness of its catholicity which comes from its participation in the mission of the Church of Jesus Christ in other parts of the world. Through its witnessing stance in its own situation, its prayers of intercession for churches in other parts of the world, and its sharing of persons and resources, it participates fully in the world mission of the Christian Church.

38. This concern for mission everywhere has been tested with the call for a moratorium, a halt—at least for a time—to sending and receiving missionaries and resources across national boundaries, in order to encourage the recovery and affirmation of the identity of every church, the concentration on mission in its own place and the freedom to reconsider traditional relations. The Lausanne Covenant noted that "the reduction of foreign missionaries and money in an evangelized country may sometimes be necessary to facilitate the national church's growth and self-reliance and to release resources for unevangelized areas."<sup>17</sup> Moratorium does not mean the end of the missionary vocation nor of the duty to provide resources for missionary work, but it does mean freedom to reconsider present engagements and to see whether a continuation of what we have been doing for so long is the right style of mission in our day.

Moratorium has to be understood *inside* a concern for world mission. It is faithfulness of commitment to Christ in each national situation which makes missionary concern in other parts of the world authentic. There can never be a moratorium of mission, but it will always be possible, and sometimes necessary, to have a moratorium for the sake of better mission.

49. The story of the churches from their earliest years is the story of faithfulness in their respective localities, but also the story of the carrying of the Gospel across national and continental boundaries; first from Jerusalem to Judaea and Samaria, then to Asia Minor, Africa and Europe, now to the ends of the earth. Christians today are the heirs of a long history of those who left their home countries and churches, apostles, monastics, pilgrims, missionaries, emigrants, to work in the name of Jesus Christ, serving and preaching where the Gospel had not yet been heard or received. With the European colonization of most of the world and later on with the expansion of the colonial and neo-colonial presence of the western powers, the churches which had their base mainly in the West have expanded their missionary service to all corners of the earth.

Surely, many ambiguities have accompanied this development and are present even today, not least the sin of proselytism among other Christian confessions. Churches and missionary organizations are analysing the experience of these past centuries in order to correct their ways, precisely with the help of the new churches which have come into being in those countries. The history of the Church, the missionary people of God, needs to continue. Each local parish, each Christian, must be challenged to assume responsibility in the total mission of the Church. There will always be need for those who have the calling and the gift to cross frontiers, to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ and to serve in his name.

40. Out of this sense of being the whole Church in mission, we recognize the specific calling to individuals or communities to commit themselves full time to the service of the church, crossing cultural and national frontiers. The churches should not allow this specialized calling of the few to be an alibi for the whole Church, but rather it should be a symbolic concentration of the missionary vocation of the whole Church. Looking at the question of people in mission today, "We perceive a change in the direction of mission, arising from our understanding of the Christ who is the centre and who is always in movement towards the periphery. While not in any way denying the continuing significance and necessity of a mutual-ity between the churches in the northern and southern hemispheres, we believe that we can discern a development whereby mission in the eighties may increasingly take place within these zones. We feel there will be increasing traffic between the churches of Asia, Africa and Latin America among whose numbers both rich and poor are counted. This development, we expect, will take the form of ever stronger initiatives from the churches of the poor and oppressed at the peripheries. Similarly among the industrialized countries, a new reciprocity, particularly one stemming from the marginalized groups, may lead to sharing at the peripheries of the richer societies. While resources may still flow from financially richer to poorer churches, and while it is not our intention to encourage isolationism, we feel that a benefit of this new reality could well be the loosening of the bond of domination and dependence that still so scandalously characterizes the relationship between many churches of the northern and southern hemispheres respectively."<sup>18</sup>

## 7. Witness among People of Living Faiths

41. Christians owe the message of God's salvation in Jesus Christ to every person and to every people. Christians make their witness in the context of neighbours who live by other religious convictions and ideological persuasions. True witness follows Jesus Christ in respecting and affirming the uniqueness and freedom of others. We confess as Christians that we have often looked for the worst in others and have passed negative judgement upon other religions. We hope as Christians to be learning to witness to our neighbours in a humble, repentant and joyful spirit.

42. The Word is at work in every human life. In Jesus of Nazareth the Word became a human being. The wonder of his ministry of love persuades Christians to testify to people of every religious and non-religious persuasion of this decisive presence of God in Christ. In him is our salvation. Among Christians there are still differences of understanding as to how this salvation in Christ is available to people of diverse religious persuasions. But all agree that witness should be rendered to all.

43. Such an attitude springs from the assurance that God is the creator of the whole universe and that he has not left himself without witness at any time or any place. The Spirit of God is constantly at work in ways that pass

human understanding and in places that to us are least expected. In entering into a relationship of dialogue with others, therefore, Christians seek to discern the unsearchable riches of God and the way he deals with humanity. For Christians who come from cultures shaped by another faith, an even more intimate interior dialogue takes place as they seek to establish the connection in their lives between their cultural heritage and the deep convictions of their Christian faith.

44. Christians should use every opportunity to join hands with their neighbours, to work together to be communities of freedom, peace and mutual respect. In some places, state legislation hinders the freedom of conscience and the real exercise of religious freedom. Christian churches as well as communities of other faiths cannot be faithful to their vocation without the freedom and right to maintain their institutional form and confessional identity in a society and to transmit their faith from one generation to another. In those difficult situations, Christians should find a way, along with others, to enter into dialogue with the civil authorities in order to reach a common definition of religious freedom. With that freedom comes the responsibility to defend through common actions all human rights in those societies.

45. Life with people of other faiths and ideologies is an encounter of commitments. Witness cannot be a one-way process, but of necessity is two-way; in it Christians become aware of some of the deepest convictions of their neighbours. It is also the time in which, within a spirit of openness and trust, Christians are able to bear authentic witness, giving an account of their commitment to the Christ, who calls all persons to himself.

## Looking toward the Future

46. Whether among the secularized masses of industrial societies, the emerging new ideologies around which societies are organized, the resurging religions which people embrace, the movements of workers and political refugees, the people's search for liberation and justice, the uncertain pilgrimage of the younger generation into a future both full of promise and overshadowed by nuclear confrontation—the Church is called to be present and to articulate the meaning of God's love in Jesus Christ for every person and for every situation.

47. The missionary vocation of the Church and its evangelistic calling will not resist the confrontation with the hard realities of daily life if it is not sustained by faith, *a faith supported by prayer, contemplation and adoration*. "Gathering and dispersing, receiving and giving, praise and work, prayer and struggle—this is the true rhythm of Christian engagement in the world."<sup>19</sup> Christians must bring their hearts, minds and wills to the altar of God, knowing that from worship comes wisdom, from prayer comes strength, and from fellowship comes endurance. "To be incorporated into Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit is the greatest blessing of the kingdom, and the only abiding ground of our missionary activity in the world."<sup>20</sup> The same Lord who sends his people to cross all frontiers and to enter into the most unknown territories in his name, is the one who assures: "I am with you always, to the close of the age."

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## Notes

1. Philip Potter's speech to the Roman Catholic Synod of Bishops, Rome, 1974.
2. Constitution of the World Council of Churches,
3. Constitution of the Conference on World Mission and Evangelism.
4. *Your Kingdom Come: Mission Perspectives* (Geneva: Commission on World Mission and Evangelism, World Council of Churches, 1980), p. 210.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 196.
6. "Confessing Christ Today, Reports of Groups at a Consultation of Orthodox Theologians," *International Review of Mission* 64, no. 253 (January 1975): 87.
7. *Breaking Barriers: Nairobi 1975*, ed. David M. Paton (London: SPCK, and Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1976), p. 233.
8. "Confessing Christ Today," *op. cit.*, pp. 90, 78.

9. *Breaking Barriers*, p. 48.
10. Philip Potter, *op. cit.*
11. *Your Kingdom Come*, p. 206.
12. *Common Witness* (Geneva: Commission on World Mission and Evangelism, [1980]), p. 28.
13. *Ibid.*
14. SEDOS Bulletin 81/No. 7.
15. *Breaking Barriers*, p. 46.
16. Catholic Bishops Conference, Puebla, 1979, para. 1134.
17. Lausanne Covenant, no. 9.
18. *Your Kingdom Come*, pp. 220–221.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 205.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 204.