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Common Witness as a Foretaste of the *Basileia*

The idea of the common witness of Christians as a missiological phenomenon became so popular in the ecumenical vocabulary that it is possible in recent literature to underline, instead of speaking about dialogue and mission, the dialectical and complementary shapes rather of dialogue and witness¹.

There are five important documents which constitute the basis of our approach to the topic in the scenario of the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Roman Catholic Church (RCC), some of them through their common body, the Joint Working Group (JWG). These are dated from 1961 till the most recent one, in 1997.

We examine the terms and definitions which surround this paradigm, especially religious freedom, Christian witness, common witness and proselytism. The theme is first grasped from the other side, that of counter-witness, corrupted witness, proselytism. We experience proselytism in rivalry, false offerings, linguistics, political power and exclusive thinking.

There are points that are very much debated and still not decided among the denominations engaging in mission: (Church and secular) history, doctrine and ecclesiology. In our future cooperation we are predestined to work together in the service for the world, in the protection of human rights and social justice.

The common study of the Bible, the word of God, the deeply engaged theological dialogue, the proper religious education and formation of all Christians, and—most importantly—the praying together and for each other can and should be essential tools and means as well.

Considering these, the concept, theory and practice of our common Christian witness are generally understood as the ruling new paradigm of mission in the XXIst century, in living out the Reign of God together.²

1 FITZGERALD Michael L. MAFR, *Witness and Dialogue* follows the history of this complementary pair: International Review of Mission LXXXVI/340. 1997/1–2. 113–117.

2 BOSCH David J., *Mission as Common Witness* formulates the seven characteristics of this new paradigm: In BOSCH David J., *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*. New York, 1991. 457–467.

There is also a reader's companion to this important book: PACHUAU Lalsangkima, *Classic Texts in Mission and World Christianity*, Norman E. Thomas (ed.): *A Reader's Companion to David Bosch's Transforming Mission (1995)*. International Review of Mission LXXXV/336. 1996/1. 121–122.



I. From *Christian* to *Common Witness*

There are five documents dealing with the very question of witness (Christian or common) in the history of the ecumenical movement at the highest level. The first one is *Christian Witness, Proselytism and Religious Liberty* (CWPRL, 1961)³. Its conception and birth was required first by the WCC Evanston Assembly in 1954.⁴

A decade later the RCC joined the ecumenical movement, and a JWG was established in 1965. One of their first documents is the *Common Witness and Proselytism* (CWP, 1970)⁵.

Their second joint statement on this topic is the most elaborated and wide-embracing among all: *Common Witness* (CW, 1982).⁶ It has an appendix with certain important and significant case studies and personal and communal testimonies.

The most recent study guide of the JWG, which was written after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the opening up of the Central and Eastern European countries, is *The Challenge of Proselytism and the Calling to Common Witness* (CPCCW, 1996).⁷

The most contemporary of all of these statements is a WCC document, *Towards Common Witness: A Call to Adopt Responsible Relationships in Mission and to Renounce Proselytism* (TCW, 1997),⁸ which is recommended to the churches by the WCC Central Committee.

Preceding this call, four meetings were held to formulate and elaborate the text itself and its content.⁹ The first was called *Towards Responsible Relationships in Mission: Some Reflections on Common Witness, Proselytism and New Forms of Sharing*, in Chambésy, Switzerland in 1993.¹⁰

The second one was intended especially to shape the Orthodox input on the theme, under the name *Mission and Proselytism*, held in Moscow, Russia, in the year 1995. It was followed by a conference in Manila in 1995, having the title *Called to Common Witness*.

Finally, in 1996, the WCC Bossey Ecumenical Institute held a meeting and conference to redraft and rewrite this message: *Towards Common Witness: a Call to Adopt Responsible Relations in Mission and to Avoid Proselytism*.

When we speak about common witness as a fundamental missiological paradigm, we should especially consider four basic terms which surround our topic. The concept of

3 Revised Report on "Christian Witness, Proselytism and Religious Liberty in the Setting of the World Council of Churches" can be found in the final report of the Assembly: In FRY Franklin Clark (ed.), *Evanston to New Delhi (1954–1961): Report of the Central Committee to the Third Assembly of the World Council of Churches*. Genève, 1961. 239–245.

4 The first version ever on this topic: *Christian Witness, Proselytism and Religious Liberty in the Setting of the World Council of Churches: A Provisional Report Submitted to the Member Churches for their Consideration*. The Ecumenical Review 1956/4. 48–56.

5 *Common Witness and Proselytism: A Study Document*. Published for example in the official forum of the World Council of Churches: The Ecumenical Review 1971/1. 9–20.

6 *Common Witness: A Study Document of the Joint Working Group of the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches*. Genève, 1980.; and The Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity–Information Service. 1980/3–4. 142–162.

7 *The Challenge of Proselytism and the Calling to Common Witness: A Study Document of the Joint Working Group*. The Ecumenical Review 1996/2. 212–221.

8 *Towards Common Witness: A Call to Adopt Responsible Relationships in Mission and to Renounce Proselytism*. Genève, 1997.

9 COONEY Monica SMSM, *Towards Common Witness: A Call to Adopt Responsible Relationships in Mission and to Avoid Proselytism* lists all four of these conferences and meetings: International Review of Mission LXXXV/337. 1996/2. 283–289.

10 Their insights can be read in the elaborated report, *Towards Responsible Relations in Mission: Some Reflections on Common Witness, Proselytism and New Forms of Sharing*. International Review of Mission LXXXII/326. 1993/2. 235–239.

religious freedom places the question in the communal context of world religions and Christian denominations and on the other hand in the personal context of free will and human individuality and personality.

The *responsibility of Christian witness* is a fundamental moral and ethical element of being authentically Christian. The *ecumenical way of witnessing* is this common one, of which we quote a definition here.

Finally, we have a look at the counter-phenomenon to witnessing, which is the betrayal of the whole movement towards visible Church unity: the phenomenon of *proselytism*, including the different kinds of proselytic actions.

The term which by now replaced Christian witness in the vocabulary of the ecumenical movement is *common witness*, a phrase which stresses the fact that separate witness to the truth is a counter-witness by itself.

1. Religious Freedom for All

In its definition of religious freedom, the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR, 1948) was influenced by contemporary theological views, schools and movements, and it also had a great impact on the later development of Christian self-understandings, for example on the RCC Second Vatican Council.¹¹

The paragraph is a beautifully elaborated one, and goes as follows: “Everyone has the right to *freedom of thought, conscience and religion*. This right includes the freedom to *change* the religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others, and in public or in private, to *manifest* this religion or belief, in teaching, practice, worship and observance.”

When the CWP (1970) mentions this whole definition, it does not miss adding a very important phrase to the last sentence: everyone has the right to manifest religion also “*in social action*.” This addition signals the explicit turnover of our theological way of thinking towards the social (and sometimes political and sociological) issues as well, since they should be—and step by step they are indeed—on the agenda of every religion, according to our present understanding.

Every right, however, has a counterpart, which should be usually a moral and ethical duty and *responsibility*. The RCC Second Vatican Council has explicitly formulated this responsibility, when it dealt with human dignity in *Dignitatis Humanae: Declaration on the Right of the Person and of Communities to Social and Civil Freedom in Matters Religious* (1965).¹² The other side of religious freedom in this setting is our common human responsibility to seek and search for the truth ceaselessly, especially because we have reason, we have conscience and moreover we have free will.

The WCC’s *Nairobi Statement* from 1975 completes this picture, adding that we also have our human responsibility to serve the whole community that we are members of and that we belong to either by blood, history, culture, or decision.

11 LITTELL Franklin H. examines this very important impact in quite a few sentences in his brilliant article: *A Response to the Decree on Religious Freedom*. In ABBOTT Walter M. SI (ed.), *The Documents of Vatican II*. New York, 1966. 697–700.

12 *Dignitatis Humanae on the Right of the Person and of Communities to Social and Civil Freedom in Matters Religious* (1965). It can be found for example in ABBOTT Walter M. SI (ed.), *The Documents of Vatican II*. New York, 1966. 675–696. http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651207_dignitatis-humanae_en.html.

2. Christian Witness to the Kingdom

Witnessing, ie. *martyria* (martyrdom) is an integral part of the nature of Christianity. Of course, the unique and decisive witness of God, the true and faithful witness in a proper sense is Jesus Christ Himself (Rev. 3,14), the source of all of our witness.¹³

Our (partial) witness (or participation in witnessing), on the other hand, includes, as the *CWPRL* (1961) document puts it, the act of persuading persons to accept the supreme authority of Jesus Christ, committing themselves to Him, and rendering Him loving service in the fellowship of His Church. This language, which was influenced by the missionary approach of the *International Missionary Council* (IMC), which had just joined the WCC in the same year at the WCC New Delhi Assembly (1961), changed in the next document, partly because of the entrance of the RCC into the ecumenical movement.

In *CWP* (1970), the definition of Christian witness is the act of proclaiming God's acts in history and seeking to reveal Jesus Christ as the true light, which shines for every human in their whole life and in the whole world. The statement discerns three fields where this genuine and authentic witness can and should take place: in the worship of God, in the responsible service of others and in the proclamation of the Good News, the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The last official paper that defines this term is the *CW* (1982), which is the most humble in the understanding of our part in this process. According to this document, Christian witness is charity, love and humility by our own being. It possesses especially two important characteristics: it always seeks a response from the others, and it is ready even for martyrdom (witnessing *by blood*, facing even death). The response which arrives from the others is enriching also for the persons witnessing, and makes them constantly rethink their relationship with the witnessed reality.

3. Common Witness: The Future Way

We are going to build on the definition now given by the *CWP* (1970) document, which understands common witness as the all-embracing sum of all joint efforts aiming to manifest the divine gifts of truth and life we Christians already share in common.

The two basic theological reasons given there are that Christians are already one by virtue of their baptism; and that Mystery, Word and Spirit are witnessing to one another, in a Trinitarian, *perichoretic* (mutually interpenetrative) way, where we are called to participate in.¹⁴

There can be a third explanation as well: that Christianity has a chance in the new territories to make a new start, maybe forgetting the schisms and sins of the past against our visible and manifest unity.¹⁵

The freshness and dynamism of the younger churches gives a new hope and impetus

13 BRIA Ion, *Witness* starts with this fundamental statement: In LOSSKY Nicholas – BONINO José Míguez – POBEE John S. – STRANSKY Tom F. – WAINWRIGHT Geoffrey – WEBB Pauline (eds.), *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*. Genève, 1991. 1067–1069.

14 BEVANS Stephen B. SVD, *Common Witness* collects the reasons, apart from the two basic ecumenical ones, for common witness: In MÜLLER Karl SVD – SUNDERMEIER Theo – BEVANS Stephen B. SVD – BLIESE Richard H. (eds.), *Dictionary of Mission: Theology, History, Perspectives*. New York, 1997. 72–73.

15 The Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity gives this rarely used insight in *The 1993 Directory for Ecumenism*. Origins 1993/9. 130–160.

for the creative manifestation of our already given but not yet fully realised unity and oneness as the only Church of Jesus Christ.

One can easily notice and see that common witness is a much broader concept than just being in cooperation with each other or just our joint efforts together. It is broader, since it needs the acknowledgement, respect and appreciation of the shared gifts of grace, truth and love in our denominations and also the frank rejoicing and joy in their exercise.¹⁶

4. Proselytism throughout the Ages

The term that has changed its meaning the most, almost from one point to a totally contrary one, is the distasteful term *proselytism*. In Biblical times (from the Greek phrase: *who comes towards*) it basically meant a person who became a member of the Jewish community by believing in YHWH and respecting the Law of Moses.

The word itself occurs only four times in the *New Testament*, once in Matthew and thrice in the Acts of the Apostles. Among others, proselytes were present at the event of Pentecost, according to Acts 2,10. In Matthew 23,15 Jesus condemns the Pharisees, and when enlisting their sins, he mentions one that they cross sea and land to make a single proselyte, but then they make this new convert twice as much a child of hell as themselves.

When the Apostles selected seven persons of good standing in Acts 6,5, full of the Spirit and wisdom, whom they appointed to the task of waiting on tables, by laying their hands on them, one of them was Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. Finally, Acts 13,43 mentions that many Jews and also many devout proselytes followed the apostles Paul and Barnabas, who spoke to them and urged them to continue their life in the grace of God.

The *Early Church* continued to use the term, but gave it another meaning, parallel with the extension of the phrase *people of God* from Jews (the people and nation of Israel) to Christians. In those times, proselytism started to mean a person of another faith who converted to Christianity by changing religion.

Some centuries later in the ecumenical movement it got a very different meaning, close to *sheep stealing*.¹⁷ In contemporary vocabulary we are not speaking about individuals marked by the name proselyte, but rather processes of churches, denoting their activity, with the suffix *-ism*.

The *CWPRL* (1961) document defines proselytism as the corruption of witness specifically in purpose, motive and spirit. This is quite a broad definition, embracing all kinds of false witnesses.

The meaning of the term is slightly narrowed by the *CWP* (1970) document. It circumscribes the word as a conglomerate of different kinds of improper attitudes and behaviours which fundamentally violate the right of the human person (either Christian or non-Christian), to be free from external coercion in different religious

16 The rejoicing and joy is stressed in STRANSKY Tom, *Common Witness*. In LOSSKY Nicholas – BONINO José Míguez – POBEE John S. – STRANSKY Tom F. – WAINWRIGHT Geoffrey – WEBB Pauline (eds.), *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*. Genève, 1991. 197–200.

17 The term is used in HORNOR Norman A., *The Problem of Intra-Christian Proselytism*. International Review of Mission LXX/280. 1981/3. 304–313.

matters. It is obvious that in this stage proselytism is understood as the opposite of religious freedom. Especially remarkable is the fact that it contains non-Christians (using the contemporary term *people of other living faiths*) as well. Of course, it does not exclude, forbid or even discourage mission as such, but calls forth our responsibility to conduct it in a fair and honest manner, free of coercion on others.

The CW (1982) document keeps and repeats this meaning, with some alterations: proselytism violates the right to be free not just from mainly external coercion, but from moral restraint as well as from psychical and psychological pressure.

The first document to sharpen the term for Christians is the CPCCW (1996), stating that proselytism is the collective noun for all conscious efforts of Christians with the intention to win adherents from other Christian communities. This is also the first place to use the word conversely to common witness.

The most elaborate and accurate definition of it is to be found in the document TCW (1997). It uses the word to denote the encouragement of Christians to change their denominational allegiance, through certain ways and means that strongly contradict the spirit of Christian love and charity, violate the freedom of the human person and diminish trust in the Christian witness of the Church of Jesus Christ.

In this broader sense proselytism is in fundamental opposition to ecumenism, to the ecumenical movement and thinking, to religious freedom and liberty, and also to our common and therefore Christian witness.

II. Credibility and Counter-Witness

The main problem with the phenomenon of proselytism is that it *scandalizes* the fellow churches and the world, and so it provides a counter-witness to the truths and depths of the Christian idea of living and believing. Now we shall take a look at the ways churches (who are sisters to each other) show bad examples by their efforts at gaining new members through fierce competition against each other, by offering advantages to the recent converts, using unmerited language, too strong ties with the state and the political powers and principalities, or a superior and exclusive way of thinking about ourselves and others.

Apart from the obvious and scandalous counter-witness in many parts of the Globe, there are some debated issues of theology which are unsolved as yet, but which are in a process of understanding and convergence among us. Examples are our approach to Church history; the doctrines and dogmas of different traditions, especially concerning sacraments (baptism and marriage); and the ecclesiological question (issues concerning the Church), which seem to embrace all the other aspects and theories.

1. History and Rivalry

We all have different historical experiences, and our understandings and interpretations of past events vary, or sometimes totally contradict each other. The historical arguments coming from *wounded memories* are poisoning our relationships. Sometimes children are blamed for the sins and faults that their parents committed a long time ago.

Most of the denominations refuse the Early Church concept of the *canonical territory*

of a certain local church. A special case here is the one of the Eastern Rite Catholics, whom some call a treasure, some a scandal, but in each case their very existence seems to be an obstacle towards unity.

Since the missionary activities of the XIXth and XXth centuries led to parallel ecclesiastical structures in the so-called *mission fields* of the younger churches, the Atlantic culture managed to export its historical divisions to other continents. Sometimes the enmities in these newly reached territories are even more fervent, fierce and tragic than in the countries and regions of the world where the separations happened so many years ago.

The ministry of reconciliation is given to the churches as an obligation and also as an opportunity. The means of that could be sharing information and accountability to each other; prior discussion with the church which already exists on a certain (canonical) territory before engaging into any kinds and sorts of mission and evangelisation work; or the continuous collaboration and cooperation while doing mission.

The ecumenical solution is to strictly renounce this denominational competition and rivalry¹⁸ of committed Christians in these territories, with a special focus on avoiding the establishment of parallel ecclesial structures. The final solution would be, of course, to form and maintain responsible relationships with each other in every aspect.

2. State and Politics

Sometimes close connections to the state in unhealthy ways cause problems in intra-Christian relationships. The political powers, principalities, and the ruling government can provide a helping hand to the oppression and harassment of minorities, or can help to put pressure on them.¹⁹

In some parts of the world the Christian churches coming from richer and wealthier countries might misuse *humanitarian aid* for the purpose of gaining new members for their religious communities. Also, when poorer people arrive to some wealthier territories, and they are immigrants and usually marginalized there, certain benefits are offered to change their denominational allegiance, and in that way to exploit these people's needs.

What we can do is to firmly condemn and disclaim any kinds of manipulations of and with humanitarian assistance in its every form, and dedicate ourselves to helping immigrants in their struggles regardless of their denomination.

The separation of state and Church is basically the fruit of the French Revolution, but nevertheless a fruitful means of living together and possessing the freedom of conscience, religious freedom and liberty, especially when this separation does not mean enmity, but can entail also cooperation in common concerns as required.²⁰

18 SAUCA Ioan, *Towards a Fresh Affirmation of the Ecumenical Commitment to Mission in Unity*. International Review of Mission LXXXVI/343. 1997/4. 383–388.

19 MEJÍA Jorge sees rightly its importance in *Non-Catholic Missions in Catholic Countries?* In KÜNG Hans (ed.), *Do we Know the Others?* Concilium 1966/14. 104–110.

20 MURRAY John Courtney SI does not hesitate to agree with it in *Religious Freedom*. In ABBOTT Walter M. SI (ed.), *The Documents of Vatican II*. New York, 1966. 672–674.

3. Language and Doctrine

Many times one can find unjust and uncharitable references to other fellow churches and towards their members in the language of some Christians, including unfair and even malevolent criticism. It can happen for instance by caricaturing the others concerning their use of arts in church buildings and other religious places, their practice of devotion towards icons, their veneration of Mary, the Holy Virgin and the other saints, or their prayers for the dead.

One can see that this way of proselytism is directed from the less liturgical churches to the more ritualistic ones. It is extremely common in these cases that people are unevenly comparing their ideals against the practices of the other communities. In some other cases there is suspicion or even the lack of respect for the culture and civilization of the partner.

Behind the question of proselytism and mission, real ecumenical problems lie, such as the content of our faith, the limits of legitimate diversity inside unity, and the goals and aims of mission and evangelisation.

The most acutely aching problem is rebaptism, since baptism is considered to be the only ecumenical *sacrament* so far, and thus a value and treasure to be protected by all Christians and Christian churches. Among the acute questions in this respect there is also marriage, and the necessity of the parents' consent in case of a child's or any youngster's conversion.

The shift from malevolent criticism to self-criticism and self-examination of conscience, to repentance and genuine inner renewal could be fruitful as well. We can offer what the Apostle Paul advised to us in his letters: let us speak the truth in love as fellow baptized members of the same Church.

What is a basic topic for our common future is the issue of education and formation inside our churches to mutual sensitivity and understanding and reciprocal trust. Only in this friendly and even sisterly and brotherly atmosphere can we really listen to each other in genuine encounter and dialogue, which leads us to an as-yet unknown future.²¹

5. Exclusivism and Ecclesiology

The Christian denominations differ also in the notion of Church membership: how to become a member, how to determine the length of it, and what our duties and responsibilities are when being a church member. Concerning the commitment of members of other denominations, a value judgement is common among us. To mention just a few: *nominal* member, *true* member, and *born-again* member.

It is also not obvious at all who can be rightly called "*unchurched*", and along with this logic, who really needs a re-evangelisation. Some denominations are engaged in and committed to Church growth and expansion in terms of mere numbers.²²

Frequently among new religious movements and *sects*, exclusivism and sectarianism

21 ARNOLD John – MARTINI Carlo Maria uses this poetic expression in '*At Thy Word: Mission and evangelisation in Europe Today. Report on the Fifth Ecumenical Encounter, Santiago de Compostela, 13–17 Nov 1991.* Catholic International 1992/2. 88–93.

22 NEWBIGIN Lesslie cannot but sadly state this in *Common Witness and Unity.* International Review of Mission LXIX/274. 1980/2. 158–160.

is very popular, culminating in fundamentalist and intolerant stances. Claims such as “the only true Church,” “the only right faith,” “the one and only way to salvation,” cause aching tensions among the people of God.

Although there are historical churches which have such and similar claims, they differ in a certain and important way that they recognize the (sacramental) possibilities of salvation in other churches and ecclesial communities as well.

This is the decisive point which can help us to differ between exclusivism and such historical claims coming from a certain ecclesiology. An eager willingness to learn from each other and to be open to the other’s gifts and the surprises of the Holy Spirit seems to be a proper and to-be-followed attitude towards the separated churches.

Our ecumenical obligation is openness and concern to discern worthy and unworthy motives in the hearts and souls of the new converts, and to consult each other when it comes to the shift of one’s denominational allegiance. Real fellowship is the very beginning and the final goal of witness in general.²³

III. Vision of a Participatory *Basileia*

We examine here six areas enlisted in the aforementioned documents, where the possibility of ecumenical cooperation and genuine common witness are already given realities. Among these fields there are *koinonia*, *diakonia* and service, the territories of human rights and social justice; the translation and study of the Bible, the word of God; deep and open theological dialogue among each other; common (or at least shared) religious education and evangelisation; and common prayer and intercession for each other.

The two main golden rules for our acting together should be as follows: Let us do all things and deeds together except where the fidelity to our conscience would forbid it. And secondly, any situation where contact and cooperation between different Christian denominations are refused must be regarded by all as abnormal.

1. Service, Human Rights and Social Justice

Diakonia and service basically mean the same thing in the community: to help all of our neighbours in their human needs²⁴, in community. This is one thing that we could easily make in common, and we also should do it, in order to multiply our capacities by this reciprocal support.

Of course, there are a lot of areas and fields where we can work together in the society. A good organizational and institutional example can and should be *Inter-Church Aid*, where one church supports and helps the other one, which is from another denomination.

In the field of human rights and social justice the denominations are able to witness together, to maintain and to show to the world the wide variety of spiritual, ethical and moral values which they share in common.²⁵ The ecclesial communities should also

23 DURRWELL Frank is right to say this in *Christian Witness: A Theological Study*. *International Review of Mission* LXIX/274. 1980/2. 121–134.

24 MAURY Philippe’s opinion comes from the students’ experience: *Witnessing in the University Communities*. *The Student World* 1953/2. 120–130.

25 MOORE Richard, *Witness: Jesus Christ’s Mandate to the Church. Response to Bishop Mortimer Arias*. *International Review*

work hand in hand for the respect of human dignity in all parts of the world, for peace in the weekdays and in the hearts and souls of the people.

These joint efforts are remarkably needed in the cases of natural disasters, hunger and different kinds of human suffering in the world. The Christian denominations are capable and also responsible to unite their forces for the development of all of humanity.

2. Dialogue, Education and Evangelisation

Much can be said about the unquestionable eagerness and need for a deep and seeking theological dialogue, as a foundation and source of our Christian common witness, and as the speaking of truth in love.

“The truth that leads to life is found only in *dialogue* and communion,”²⁶ says Maria Teresa Porcile SANTISO. Because of its basic and elementary importance, we mention here the common research of the Holy Scripture, and the different publications and statements on still divisive issues.

The word of God, the Bible, should be treated as our common Christian ground on which we can grow together in sharing community and visible unity. One means of this growing is the common ecumenical translation of the Bible (including, of course, the deuterocanonical books or apocrypha, at least in the appendix).

Another means are the reading together of the Holy Book, the Sacred Scriptures, common Bible studies, pulpit exchange, common schoolbooks for Biblical studies; and there are many other ways of studying the Bible, being pilgrims in a road where our own ecumenicity requires us to do all these.²⁷

We have already mentioned the strong importance of common religious education and common Christian evangelisation. One kind of organ among the many to fulfil this task of ours is the system of national and regional (and the world) councils of churches.

There the genuine and deep listening to each other and also the thankful and grateful receiving from the others as well as the “bringing together the fruits of the discussions and debates”²⁸ can genuinely take place.

3. Prayer for and with the Others

So far we followed the glorious road of the term *common witness* in the ecumenical age of mission and evangelism. We were not silent about the wrong, bad and dangerous side of this missiological phenomenon, proselytism. We examined the misuse of our common vocation to witness Jesus Christ to the world. We kept in mind the still undecided or unclear questions as well, which need further elaboration, study and investigation.

In the dimension of spiritual ecumenism, the celebration of our interrelatedness,

of Mission LXV/257. 1976/1. 34–36.

²⁶ Poetic expression by SAUCA Ioan, *One Gospel – Diverse Expressions*. International Review of Mission LXXXV/337. 1996/2. 253–256.

²⁷ SANTISO Maria Teresa Porcile, *Common Bible Work: A Living Parable of Common Witness*. International Review of Mission LXX/279. 1981/2. 174–176.

²⁸ YUNG Hwa, *David J. Bosch: Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*. International Review of Mission LXXXI/322. 1992/2. 319–324.

Another important review of this book: KIM Kirsteen, *Post-Modern Mission: A Paradigm Shift in David Bosch's Theology of Mission?* International Review of Mission LXXXIX/353. 2000/2. 172–179.

like the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity (and also the Universal Day of Prayer for Students), liturgy is essential and cannot be omitted. This can be exercised by certain charismatic communities, by different monastic orders, also by religious fellowships and ecumenical groups (such as the Bossey Ecumenical Institute in Switzerland, or the Békés Gellért Ecumenical Institute in Pannonhalma, Hungary), or even by the smallest (sometimes ecumenical) unit of the Church, the marriage or *ecclesiola* (small church).

The further elaboration of our common notion on the truth (the area of scientific epistemology) and our common notion on the Church (the very field of ecclesiology) and the united (but naturally still very much diversified) understanding of the mission of the Church as *Missio Dei*, are tasks which remain for the future.

In solidarity with and interceding for each other we can strengthen our ties; a process which should and will conclude in the final and eschatological common witness: the all-embracing sharing of the supreme sacrament of ours, the Holy Eucharist. In our prosperous future, a lot of common hopes and expectations can finally find their fulfilment, with the help of God, in God's *Basileia*. Ahead of common witness, there is still an important role to play until its blossoming: the common witness of an already visibly united Church.

Suggested Reading

- ALBORNOZ A. F. Carrillo DE, *The Ecumenical and World Significance of the Vatican Declaration on Religious Liberty*. The Ecumenical Review 1966/1. 58–84.
- BEVANS Stephen B. SVD, *Common Witness*. In MÜLLER Karl SVD – SUNDERMEIER Theo – BEVANS Stephen B. SVD – BLIESE Richard H. (eds.), *Dictionary of Mission: Theology, History, Perspectives*. New York, 1997. 72–73.
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- FITZGERALD Michael L. MAFR, *Witness and Dialogue*. International Review of Mission LXXXVI/340. 1997/1–2. 113–117.
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