ODYSSEY TOWARD UNITY

Foundations and Functions of

Ecumenism and Conciliarism

by

Committee on Purposes and Goals of Ecumenism

Massachusetts Council of Churches

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The Massachusetts Council of Churches is grateful for this

ecumenical support and cooperation. We hope that

"Odyssey Toward Unity" will continue to help educate new

generations of ecumenical leaders

Sisters and Brothers in Christ, Greetings!

We commend to your study and response *Odyssey Toward Unity,* a booklet which we believe will significantly aid in understanding the ecumenical movement and its conciliar expressions. Comparable "faith and order" efforts by councils of churches are at the very least unusual in ecumenical annals.

On behalf of the Board of Directors of the Massachusetts Council of Churches, I want to express our deepest gratitude to our Committee on the Purposes and Goals of Ecumenism. Their hard labor shall not go unrewarded nor their counsel unheeded!

Two gifts helped to make the printing of this book possible: one from the Episcopal Diocese of Western Massachusetts and another in memory of Mary Dowd and George C. Dowd, M.D. We deeply appreciate these generous expressions of ecumenical commitment. We, of course, will need other gifts to cover the full costs.

Our prayer is that *Odyssey* will move the Church one small step closer to unity, to the glory of God and the service humankind.

The Rev. Canon W. David Crockett

President

Massachusetts Council of Churches

October, 1977

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COMMITTEE ON PURPOSES

AND GOALS OF ECUMENISM

MASSACHUSETTS COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

The Committee on the Purposes and Goals of Ecumenism was created by the Board of Directors of the Massachusetts Council of Churches in March, 1976. The Committee was appointed by the President of the Council and authorized to prepare this booklet. It began meeting in June, 1976, and completed its task in June, 1977. The members of the Committee, listed below, speak for themselves, not as the official or sanctioning voices of any Christian communions.

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A PREFACE:

ON WHYS AND WHEREFORES

A. For Whom?

If you fall into any of the following categories, these pages are addressed to you. We are writing for

clergy and lay people,

zealous ecumenists and dubious bystanders,

members of boards of directors and committees in ecumenical organizations and people "too busy to attend another meeting,"

denominational decision-makers and "persons in the pews,"

churches active in conciliar bodies and churches which are open to the possibility,

persons who believe that the unity of the church is a demand of the Gospel and persons who dispute this claim,

residents of Massachusetts and those elsewhere who want to overhear what we are saying, and

places where conciliar bodies exist and places where they should exist.

Our intended audience is as varied as the ecumenical movement is broad. We probably cannot reach any single grouping, with maximum impact in view of the diversity of our general audience. Our hope, nonetheless, is that for all, ecumenical understanding will be advanced and ecumenical commitment will be stimulated.

B. An Ecumenical Crisis?

Ecumenical commitment is not an occasional option for the Christian; it is a perennial obligation. Ecumenism rests on the firm foundation of the Gospel of reconciliation.

Despite the solid rootage of ecumenism in the Gospel itself, the death or dying of the ecumenical movement has become one of the most widespread rumors circulated by churchly pundits. Noting the obvious facts that most ecumenical institutions - notably councils of churches at the local, state, national, and world levels - have experienced significant declines in funding, programs, and public acclaim, these commentators usually have projected the early and quiet demise of ecumenism. In contrast, the few respondents to the predictors of doom have diagnosed continued vitality in the ecumenical movement. They have called attention to the major progress made in inter-church relations. They have described the indisputable problems of ecumenical institutions as "temporary setbacks," "signs of maturing," "reflections of the general church scene," or "a time for rethinking and restructuring." Sometimes they have noted that the dire forecasts on ecumenism have replaced the writing of obituaries on the local church or the Church itself.

On one point, however, both sides are in substantial agreement: the ecumenical movement has serious problems; it is in a state of crisis. In other words, we stand at a decisive juncture, a crucial moment, at which decisions and commitments made today will determine the progress or regression of ecumenical relations for decades to come! Ecumenism is too near the center of meaning of the Gospel of reconciliation for the crisis to be terminal, but the danger of a lengthy illness and recuperation is real and historically precedented.

Crises, however, can produce creative responses, hopeful initiatives. History is overflowing with examples of crucial times generating, even compelling, renewed thinking and acting. Serious problems can awaken us from the doldrums, from the lethargy of resting contented with the tentative achievements of the past.

C. A Response to Crisis

Making a creative response to crisis was the motivating force in the creation of the Committee on the Purposes and Goals of Ecumenism and the authorization of this booklet by the Board of Directors of the Massachusetts Council of Churches. The Council's Board has been aware of the urgent problems being faced by ecumenical institutions. Primarily, the Board heard most councils of churches asking such questions as: What are we? What should we be doing? Where should we be going?" The Board, therefore, diagnosed the situation as essentially a crisis of purpose and roles. One of the significant factors contributing to ecumenical recession (other than the major fact that the woes of ecumenism are reflections of the plight of the churches in general) is that ecumenical structures have lost (or never possessed) a sense of their fundamental purposes, an abiding awareness of their reasons for being and doing.

They often have floundered without directions, forgetting the theological mandates for ecumenism and the essential task of an ecumenical body. The Committee on the Purposes and Goals of Ecumenism was created as a first step, a start, in reversing that process.

D. Defining Our Purpose

The Committee's purpose, therefore, is to help church people and churches, especially councils of churches, in Massachusetts to define and refine the general purposes and goals (or foundations and functions) of ecumenical bodies. The overall task includes:

1) Defining the nature of ecumenism and its problem areas.

2) Outlining the scriptural/theological foundations for ecumenical involvement.

3) Establishing guidelines or criteria on the goals or tasks of ecumenical bodies, against which actual programs can be evaluated.

4) Indicating what topics ought to be on the ecumenical agenda for our time.

5) Determining the mutual responsibilities of councils of churches and member bodies.

The following pages will reveal the extent to which we achieved our tasks. We know our limits, however We make no pretense of trying to cover the whole ecumenical waterfront. The movement is too large and diversified to accomplish that task. Equally, we have no illusions that we are uttering the final proclamation. We hope that our interpretations, despite the inevitable flaws and omissions, will generate discussion, correction, and refinement.

E. A Few Caveats

A revived commitment to the ecumenical task is in part a consequence of a renewed understanding of that task, just as religious education is rightly perceived as a buttressing of Christian faith. The assumption of this booklet, therefore, is a hopeful one: understanding can be a stimulus to resolve, a primary factor in revitalizing the ecumenical movement.

Ecumenism is much more than conciliarism (commonly meaning the council of churches movement). Ecumenism has many forms and formats, ranging from bilateral conversations between international commissions to ad hoc dialogues and worship services among Christians in a small town. Yet, conciliarism is a primary form of ecumenism today. Its diminution would seriously hamper the ecumenical cause for our time. The work of the Committee on the Purposes and Goals of Ecumenism is based on the value assumption that conciliarism can be and should be restored to a prominent place in making visible and effective the unity and mission of Christ’s Church. This booklet emerges from an affirmation of the conciliar movement, without in any way downplaying the many positive contributions of other forms of ecumenism. Councils of churches would be weakened if these other ecumenical forms did not exist – and vice

versa, of course.

This booklet, however, is anything but a defense of some current practices in the conciliar movement. The following pages are often reactions to the faults and unfaithfulness in our conciliar structures. Our problems today, may, in fact, represent God's judgment on our sins against the ecumenical mandate of the Gospel. Fortunately, though, God's judgments are also His blessings - what one Biblical scholar has called "the grace of wrath." We have been given the opportunity to revise our errors and revive our resolve.

F. Steps on the Way

What should the reader anticipate in the succeeding pages? What are the main steps of progression toward the completion of our task?

Chapter I is a succinct summary of the Biblical witness concerning the unity of the church and the peoples of the earth.

Chapter II, on the basis of the Biblical witness, is an effort to interpret the meaning of, the reasons for, and the main elements in the ecumenical gift and task.

Chapter III is an outline of some reasons for the cutbacks and setbacks affecting many ecumenical institutions.

Chapter IV focuses on councils of churches, interpreting their form and character in light of the ecumenical task.

Chapter V lists the marks or signs in conciliar bodies which are trying to be truly ecumenical bodies, functioning as forerunners of a greater church unity and as embodiments of the church's mission.

Chapter VI represents an effort to bring all the highlights into sharp focus. It is a summary of our conclusions and recommendations.

Always our intent is to increase ecumenical commitment through expanding ecumenical understanding.

CHAPTER I.

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

Every Christian is called by the Bible to celebrate God's gift of unity in the Church (John 17:20-22; Ephesians 4:4-6) and in the human family (Genesis 1:26-28; Psalm 8; Isaiah

56:7). From the Genesis account of the creation to St. John's mystical vision of the new heaven and the new earth, the Bible witnesses again and again to the constancy of God's renewal of the creation (Genesis 9:9-17; Psalm 65:5-13; Romans 8:22-23), God's continual reaching out to humanity with the offer of fellowship (Genesis 6:11-18; 17:1-2; Romans 5:8), and God's invitation to all persons to live in a relationship of love with each other (Matthew 5:43-48).

If we had no other fragment of scripture than John 3:16-17, we would have more than sufficient evidence to realize that God's love for the whole world, offered to us in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, is a love which empowers us to be reconciled both with God and with each other. Where this reconciliation, this making of peace, leaves its recipients indifferent toward each other (Galatians 6:2; I Corinthians 11:17-22), or at enmity with each other (I Corinthians 1:10-17), or blind to the relationship between unity in the Church and unity in the total human family (Matthew 22:39; 25:31-46), it is an atrophied reconciliation which falls short of its actual possibilities within history (I John 4:20-21).

The churches of Christendom to which we belong are not only diverse expressions of Christ's one Church. They are disunited structures. Secular society is not only pluralistic in its racial, economic, political and other characteristics. It is at war within itself. The Bible affirms the place of diversity in the creation (Genesis 1:24-25; Psalm 148), among the people of God (Numbers 34:13-29; I Corinthians 12), and in the family of nations (Isaiah 2:1-4). But it calls us to reconciliation when we separate ourselves from the creation and abuse the earth (Genesis 1:28-31), when we separate our churches into isolated parts which behave as though each without the others were the whole Church of Christ (I Corinthians 1:10-17; 12:14-26), and when we separate persons from persons by mutilating society through distinctions, carved in human tissue by the sword of racism, sexism, greed, totalitarianism, or any other injustice (Amos 5:11-24; James 2:1-17).

In a Church divided, in a world society divided, the Bible summons the People of God to do everything that love permits and everything that the truth requires for the growth of unity in the Church and reconciliation among all the peoples of the earth.

CHAPTER II.

A NEW LOOK AT THE ECUMENICAL TASK

When a boxing promoter describes a fight between two men of different ethnic backgrounds as an "ecumenical bout," it is at least a hint that the idea of ecumenism is not as clearly understood as the word is widely used.

What is the meaning of ecumenism? Why should the churches seek unity? What is organic unity? What is the relationship between unity and diversity, or unity and mission,

or reconciliation in the Church and within the human family? These are fundamental questions confronting the ecumenical movement in theory and practice, but sound answers are not common in church circles today.

Our intent in this chapter is to restate and clarify some of the ecumenical axioms, to promote an understanding of some primary elements in the rich heritage of ecumenical thought. Our hope is to exorcise some misinterpretations which can hinder ecumenical commitment.

A. Defining Ecumenism

The term "ecumenism" is derived from the Greek word *oikoumene* (combining the verbs *oikeo* - to dwell, and *meno* - to remain). Classically, *oikoumene* referred to the lands occupied by Greeks, as opposed to lands occupied by barbarians. In the New Testament, the word in almost all cases referred either to the Roman-dominated world, the empire, and/or its inhabitants (e.g., Luke 2:1; Acts 11:28; Acts 17:6), or to the whole inhabited earth Matthew 24:14; Romans 10:18; Revelation 3:10*).* Oikoumene generally is translated as "the world." Hence, following original usage, the term can connote the whole inhabited earth or the unity of humankind.

The Christian Church, however, early appropriated the term, and ecumenism began to mean the Church in its wholeness, or the Church Universal in all its geographical branches. For example, an Ecumenical Council of the Church, like Nicea or Chalcedon, was a gathering of Christian leaders from all the regional expressions of the one Church. It was a manifestation of oneness, and spoke for the Church as a whole.

The rise of the ecumenical movement in this century gave the word new and vital connotations. Ecumenism now refers to the wholeness among diverse expressions of the Christian Church, or to the efforts to express unity among the separated Christian households of faith. These new meanings, of course, are the ones which point to the essence of the ecumenical movement in contemporary Christianity.[1]

The following working definition of ecumenism is one which seems to reflect the general assumptions and assertions among its practitioners and theoreticians:

> ECUMENISM IS THE VARIETY OF EFFORTS WITHIN AND AMONG THE CHRISTIAN CHURCHES TO GIVE VISIBLE EXPRESSION TO THEIR UNITY IN JESUS CHRIST, IN RESPONSE TO THE HOLY SPIRIT, THROUGH DIVERSE ACTS OF RECONCILIATION TO HEAL ALL THEIR DIVISIONS, AND THROUGH COMMON WITNESS AND SERVICE TO THE WORLD.

This definition is the one assumed throughout these pages. Much of what follows is, in effect, a commentary on this definition.

A definition, of course, serves both inclusive and exclusive functions. The above definition is sufficiently broad too include many forms of ecumenical activity, from major

institutions to small discussion groups. It is also appropriately narrow to exclude some self-styled forms of ecumenism. Intentions and consequences are both critical factors. Unless the characteristics of the above definition are part of the conscious intents and programmatic effects, a given activity can be interdenominational or coalitional in structure and function, but it is not in itself a form of Christian ecumenism.

The original and ecclesiastical meanings of the word "ecumenism" - the whole world and the whole Church - are not lost in the above definition. An intimate relationship exists between the unity of the Church and the unity of humankind in ecumenical theology. A fundamental purpose for making visible the unity of the Church is "that the world may believe" (John 17:21), that a credible witness will be made to the reconciling powers of the Gospel. The Christian faithful work and hope for the ultimate binding together of humankind with one another and with the God who created them for fellowship with Himself (Revelation 21:3f).

The Church is to be a SIGN of this coming Kingdom, a forerunner heralding Christ's redemptive purpose to break down the barriers of Babel and to embrace all persons in the Lord's new creation. The unity of the Church (Christian ecumenism), therefore, is to be a call, a prelude, to the unity of the whole human family.

B. Why Unity?

Ecumenical involvement is both a practical value and a theological demand.

A legitimate motivation for ecumenical involvement is practical in nature. "Pragmatic ecumenism" seeks the avoidance of waste and the duplication of effort among the churches, in order to manifest sound stewardship and to conduct the mission of the Church effectively and efficiently. Such a rationale is always valid, but it is needed especially in a time of scarce church resources - of time, money, energy, and people. For instance, the growing interdependence of peoples, it is often said, makes the visible unity of the Church a necessity: the emerging evils from new powers and principalities are too strong for divided churches. Practical factors, however, even when theologically grounded in concepts like responsible stewardship, provide only a secondary motivation for ecumenical involvement. The primary motivation, the sufficient cause for ecumenism, is derived from a scriptural and traditional understanding of the nature of the Church. The faithful Church of Christ must be one!

"Everything which the New Testament teaches concerning the Church presupposes its essential unity," claimed the Second World Conference on Faith and Order (Edinburgh, 1937).[2] Jesus prayed that His followers "might be one" (John 17:21). St. Paul asked the quarreling Corinthians derisively, "Is Christ divided?" (I Corinthians 1:13) and answered emphatically, "No!" Paul also told the Galatians that "You are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28), and regularly described the Church as "one body in Christ" (Romans 12:4-5) with one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism (Ephesians 4:4-6). In the New Testament, the unity of the Church is a gift of God in Jesus Christ; He is the head of the

Church and the members are the body of Christ; He makes the many to be one, reconciling them to Himself.[3] A breach in oneness is a break with Christ, a serious contradiction of the Gospel of reconciliation.[4]

Disunity, however, has never been foreign to the life of the Church.

In the New Testament, fractures within the Body of Christ are evident (Galatians 2:11-14; Acts 15). In fact, St. Paul's emphasis on unity probably was, in part, a reaction to the divisions which prevailed. Equally, the subsequent history of the Church reveals numerous splits and ruptures centuries prior to the Reformation. The institutional unit, which veiled underlying divisions, was in itself often an imposition by fire and sword. The Eastern and Western churches – Constantinople and Rome - severed relationships in the year 1054, after centuries of conflict and functional separation. The Protestant Reformation institutionalized the division in the church of the West, even though the Protestant reformers wanted to avoid disruption and constantly worked for the restoration of unity.[5] In America, religious fragmentation emerged largely as a result of the transplanting of old world schisms and nationalism, and was supplemented by individualistic, sectarian and exclusivistic impulses. Division has been a normal part of the Church's history, but it is not a normative condition. From the New Testament through the Reformation to the present ecumenical movement, divisions in the one Church of Christ have been viewed as a violation of God’s design.

Unity has been such a potent feature in the Church's historical self-definition, that it is one of the four classical notes of the Church: one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. In fact, unity is of the essence of the Church's nature, and it is essential to the Church's mission.[6]

Why this emphasis upon unity in scripture and history? Why are the present divisions among Christians in the one Body of Christ called "sinful and scandalous"? The answer is based upon the demand for consistency between our being and our message. The Church proclaims a central message of oneness, of finding unity in Christ, of reconciliation among persons and with God, of love for one another. Yet, Christendom is fractured into a multitude of isolated parts which function disjointedly. We are separated by denomination, race, class, sex, nation, liturgy, doctrine, and every other division which culture has devised. The diversity of creation has degenerated into divisions characterized by exclusion and isolation. Even the sacrament of unity, the Lord's Supper, separates us from one another. These divisions contradict the given nature of the Church, obscuring the reality of the reconciling powers in God's love and thereby impeding the mission of reconciliation to a broken world. God's gift of a love which unites us in our differences can be fully experienced and fully seen only in a Church which is visibly one.

To proclaim oneness, we must seek oneness in the internal life of the people of God. The credibility of the Gospel is at stake. Our message of reconciliation will not be heard clearly, if at all, by a disbelieving world until we seek more fully to resolve the

contradictions between what we are and what we affirm. Only a people living in reconciliation can communicate a message of reconciliation.[7]

The term "ecumenical Christianity," therefore, is a redundancy. Christianity is ecumenical in its essence. Every Christian and every church are called, in duty, to witness to the ecumenical imperative of the Gospel by seeking visible expressions of oneness among all who name Christ as Lord.

Why unity? NO VISIBLE UNITY, NO VIABLE WITNESS!

C. What Kind of Unity?

The ecumenical movement often is accused of trying to force a predetermined master plan of uniformity on the churches, a blueprint for a super-Church. Yet, in fact, ecumenists are generally and intentionally silent or vague on the ultimate forms of unity.

The ecumenical movement does not presuppose an answer to the question it is discussing. The World Council of Churches, for instance, is an embodiment of the conviction that the Church ought to be one, but it is neutral concerning the proper and ultimate form of unity.[8] It, like other conciliar bodies, is a place to share various perspectives on the unity which God requires and to follow what He may reveal.[9]

Yet, some descriptions of the unity we seek have received widespread approval within the ecumenical movement. Perhaps one of the best known descriptions emerged from the Third Assembly of the World Council of Churches in New Delhi in 1961:

"We believe that the unity which is both God's will and his gift to the Church is being made visible as all in each place who are baptized into Jesus Christ and confess him as Lord and Saviour are brought by the Holy Spirit into one fully committed fellowship, holding the one apostolic faith, preaching the one Gospel, breaking the one bread, joining in common prayer, and having a corporate life reaching out in witness and service to all and who at the same time are united with the whole Christian fellowship in all places and all ages in such wise that ministry and members are accepted by all, and that all can act and speak together as occasion requires for the tasks to which God calls his people." [10]

The full report of the section on unity at the New Delhi Assembly was, in effect, a commentary on this brief description of unity, but the vagueness of the vision and the reality of division are apparent throughout.

In 1975**,** the Fifth Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Nairobi gave a "further elaboration" of the "full organic unity" sketched in the New Delhi statement, saying that "the one Church is to be envisioned as a conciliar fellowship of local churches which are themselves truly united."[11] We shall quote the Nairobi statement in full and comment briefly on its meaning in a subsequent section. Here it is sufficient to note that the vagueness of meaning remains, characterized by ambiguous words and ideas allowing

diverse interpretations. The ecumenical movement strives for the unity which God wills and provides, but it cannot yet see clearly the lines of God's designs. "Now we see in a mirror darkly..."

Obviously, the ecumenical movement does not have a blueprint for the future. The movement certainly assumes that the Church must have visible unity, that is, a corporate form which manifests oneness. Christianity is an incarnational faith; a merely spiritual or invisible unity is foreign to the nature of the faith. Yet, it is also widely assumed that the full unity of the Church cannot be manifested organizationally until it has grown organically - until the spirit of renewal has overcome the lovelessness, the complacency, the self-sufficiency of the present age. The ecumenical movement is a continuing effort to describe and embody a vision revealed in Christ; it is not an organizational chart or model.

One characteristic feature, however, of ecumenical thought deserves special consideration. It is that the one Church, tentatively or ultimately, must embody great diversity in unity.

D. Diversity in Unity

Diversity reflects the richness of God's creation and the many valid responses to God's abundant gifts. Plurality of form and expression are at the heart of human experience and, therefore, equally of the Christian life.

Hence, Christian unity does not mean uniformity. The whole thrust of the ecumenical movement is contrary to monolithic interpretations and embodiments of the one faith. It seeks ways to maintain diversity of structure, liturgy, and theology in the context of a common faith and mission.

On the one hand, the virtue of having many different traditions within Christianity is that the value of diversity is preserved in practice. Some Christian traditions claim to express more of the fullness of Christian truth than others, but they also acknowledge that virtually all traditions express at least some elements of the church which God wills. From the perspective, however, of most Christian bodies, no single tradition exclusively embodies the totality of Christian truth; each can and must be enriched by the emphases, gifts, and visions of the others. The abundant blessings of God are received and expressed in a great variety of institutional forms, idiomatic styles, and liturgical expressions. Diversity is evident.

The vice, on the other hand, of our numerous denominational forms is that diversity has degenerated into division. Genuine diversity presumes our differences in one household of faith. Instead, Christians today are separated from one another, living often in isolation, exclusiveness, self-aggrandizement, self-containment, and competition. Certainly some divisions have occurred with just cause, perhaps to preserve the integrity of the faith, or to revitalize some ignored principle or practice, or to avoid unjust

authority. Yet, even when no alternative but secession exists and no matter who is to blame, it must be clear that both sides suffer, that the Church as a whole suffers.[12] We have failed to embrace our diversity – the valuable differences among us – in a common bond; we have weakened the whole by dividing and isolating the strengths of the several parts. The ecumenical task, therefore, is to renew the Church by overcoming our divisions while preserving our cherished diversity.

God has imparted unique gifts and functions to different Christian traditions - good preaching to some and a sacramental emphasis to others, joyful song to some and silence to others, an evangelistic focus for one and a social mission for another, a theological system for one and a warming of the heart for others. Despite the sense of self-sufficiency and even exaggerated wholeness which prevails in most religious traditions, each of us is woefully deprived unless we too receive the gifts given to others. The ecumenical experience, therefore, is that of one tradition sharing the unique gifts with which God has blessed it, and receiving the unique gifts which God has imparted to others. This mutual sharing is mutual enrichment.

Hence, the unity we seek does not entail a compromise of truth nor a sacrifice of our unique gifts, but instead offers a greater awareness of the truth and a sharing of our riches within a common bond.[13]

The emerging concept of the one Church as "conciliar fellowship" is, in fact, intended to show how deeply committed the ecumenical movement is to diversity in unity. The Fifth Assembly of the World Council of Churches said that conciliar fellowship "underlines the fact the true unity is not monolithic, does not override the special gifts given to each member and to each local church, but rather cherishes and protects them."[14] Ecumenists simply do not yet know how to make "operational" this "true" unity in the midst of such great diversity. How, for instance, can a hierarchical body be part of one, corporately united Church with a congregational body? The many practical difficulties appear formidable from our human perspective. Yet, the unity of the Church is a gift of the Holy Spirit. Through Him, our oneness in the context of pluralism will be a vital sign to the world of the reconciling powers of the Gospel.

Limits inevitably must exist on diversity; otherwise the witness of the Church will be diffused of disrupted. No precise guidelines can be offered here, but a general suggestion from the Consultation on Church Union (COCU) should be noted:

> The Church is comprehensive in its capacity to embrace and sustain diversity in the expression of faith, life, witness, and service…. Nevertheless, attitudes, words, and actions that are clearly contrary to the truth which is in Christ, or injurious to the life and mission of the community, must be judged and corrected.[15]

Precision in determining the limits of diversity is a subject of considerable debate, but few will deny that diversity can no more be allowed to destroy integrity than can unity

crush diversity.

We cannot have nor should we want a unity without diversity. In fact, diversity is a fundamental characteristic of the unity we seek, Diversity, however, apart from the goal of unity, is really a euphemism for division, severance in the Body of Christ.

E. Organic Unity

The common way in ecumenical circles of expressing the relationship between unity and diversity is the idea of organic unity. Some persons have objected to this concept, contending that organic unity implies a rigid, organizational uniformity which is incompatible with the inevitable diversity resulting from spiritual freedom.[16] Such an objection, however, seems to be based on a misinterpretation of the meaning of organic unity. To most if its supporters, organic unity means some form of organizational union to make visible the unity of the church, but one in which vast diversity will be preserved. The World Consultation of United Churches in Toronto in 1975 called us to "a determined commitment to work for organic union as a sign of Christ's reconciling love, " and then reminded us of the consistency between unity and diversity: "The striking diversity of the shapes, structures, and liturgies of the present united churches is testimony to the fact that organic union does not lead to a monolithic, uniform church."[17]

Organic unity is a concept derived from St. Paul's image of the Church as the Body of Christ. The body is an organism which incorporates diverse parts into a living whole. Christ is the head of the Body, the Church, and the source of our unity (Colossians 1:18). The many members of the body (both individual Christians and denominational institutions) are all valuable to the work of Christ. The body is characterized by diversity of function. Each part plays a role, but not a separate role, since all parts are needed for the effective functioning of the whole and are mutually responsible for the well-being of one another ("If one member suffers, all suffer together"). The body thrives only when all parts are working together for the common good; the body is diminished when any part is severed, fractured, of injured (I Corinthians 12). "So it is with the Church: diversity in unity.

Understandably, the ecumenical movement has adopted the concept of organic unity as its goal. Following the image of the Body of Christ, organic unity is the goal of bringing together in some organized form the diverse part of the Church for the sake of Christ's mission to the world.

F. Unity and Mission

The roots of the contemporary ecumenical movement are in international missionary service and evangelism, Christian educational efforts, and the quest for social justice - all of which are vital components of the Church's mission, or task of witness, to the world. The origins reflect fidelity to the demands of the Gospel, for unity and mission are inseparable.

Ecumenical institutions sometimes are accused of compromising the Church’s witness. Undoubtedly, some institutions have abandoned or diluted parts of the Church’s mission in order to maintain a semblance of unity among their member-bodies. True unity in Christ, of course, is not at odds with a strong mission, but the problems which ecumenical organizations face in keeping diverse bodies together while conducting a controversial program in mission are certainly not illusions. In our pre-ecumenical world, conflicts between the call to be one and the call to witness are inevitable and serious. These problems are, in reality, manifestations of the standard organizational dilemma, illustrating that the unity we now express is still partial and tenuous. Dilemmas remain.

The dilemmas can never be resolved, however, in favor of a tenuous unity at the expense of an effective witness, because an ecumenical body's reason for being is to express unity *in* mission - in both evangelism and social justice, in both worship and service. We seek unity for faithfulness in mission, oneness *for* credible witness. We seek internal reconciliation *in order to* proclaim to the world the reconciling love in Christ. Hence, it is a complete reversal of the Gospel's mandate to abandon mission for the sake of unity. The art and mandate of the ecumenical enterprise are to keep unity and mission in tandem. When dilemmas arise, as they inevitably will, no easy resolution is possible and no easy counsel is tolerable. But whatever the solution, the essential mission of the Church cannot be abandoned.

Oneness and witness are so inseparable that the ecumenical task must contain both components in its self-description - for example, making visible and effective the unity and mission of the Church. Some writers, in fact, maintain that our unity will grow not as we seek it directly, but as we work together in meeting the needs of humanity.[18] The truth, however, is somewhere in between: both the traditional "life and work" and "faith and order" movements are necessary and interrelated efforts in our search for fuller unity. In any case, when we speak of unity, we include mission as one of its vital characteristics.

Earlier, we said: No visible unity, no viable witness. We add now an equally important maxim: *NO VITAL MISSION, NO VALID UNITY*

CHAPTER III.

STUMBLING BLOCKS:

AN ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

In less than two decades, the major churches have moved from centuries-old suspicions and mutual charges of heresy to genuine sharing and mutual respect. In historical perspective, this deep and rapid change in inter-denominational relationships verges on the miraculous. This fact of progress inevitably colors our interpretations, but we cannot permit it to blind us to the real and ominous problems on the ecumenical

scene.

Changing the facts requires knowing the facts. Our purpose in this section is to provide a candid analysis and interpretation of the difficulties and dilemmas confronting the ecumenical movement, particularly its conciliar forms. We are trying to answer such questions as: Why are ecumenical institutions on such a broad scale experiencing cutbacks in funding and reductions in programs? Why has the number of ecumenical institutions in the nation declined? What are the reasons for the evident morale problems and apathy in many councils of churches? Why do so many observers of the religious scene note an apparent waning in ecumenical interest and awareness in the church public?

The answers to these questions are many and complex. Causation, as usual, is multiple and inter-related. We can cite a few of the factors probably contributing to current ecumenical problems, but we make no pretense at exhausting the reasons, nor of weaving them into a coherent whole, nor of doing anything more than stating hypotheses which others can test by their experience and data. If occasional inconsistencies are evident in our analysis, they may be reflections of reality.

A. General Church Situation

Some features of American church life create indirect problems for ecumenical institutions. These problems are not unique to ecumenical agencies; they are part of the cultural atmosphere which affects churches in general and ecumenical institutions in particular.

Ecumenical bodies, like their members, reflect the crises of society - such as secularism, economic inflation, and cultural fragmentation. The downbeat in religious concern and the fluctuations in the economy have repercussions for all religious institutions. Moreover, the divisions in our society - ideological, ethnic, class, etc. - permeate church life. Society is fragmented, and the task of promoting Christian unity is doubly complicated in a fractured environment.

Conflict over the social mission of the Church has been a main feature of American religious life for decades - and conciliar bodies have been a primary vehicle for the churches in expressing that social mission. Anti-conciliar attitudes, therefore, probably reflect some antisocial justice sentiments. At issue is the question of the nature of the Christian mission: is it primarily, or even exclusively, one of proclaiming the message of salvation for individuals, or does it include in a major way a corporate pursuit of social justice? By opting rightly for the latter, conciliar bodies have touched some bared nerves.[19] In the classic dilemma, the attempt to transcend the unjust divisions in society probably has cost many conciliar structures some needed support.[20]

Casual commitments to the trying demands of the Gospel are widespread in the churches. It is not surprising, therefore, that casual ecumenism has become the foe of

the mandate for Christian unity. Many church people will affirm ecumenism. But since what we do is not always in conformity with what we say, we seek ways to resolve the contradictions. Downgrading ecumenical programs, for instance, may be one way to justify non-participation. More frequently, however, a casual tokenism, such as a once-a-year Thanksgiving service, becomes a means to satisfy the urgings of the self for consistency between affirmation and behavior. Contentment with a casual cooperation becomes a substitute for the hard, unnerving claims of the "Lund Principle,"[21] not to mention the Gospel.

The American emphasis on individualism has adversely affected church life, including ecumenical bodies. Thus, "individualistic ecumenism" is often a substitute for corporate ecumenism. For example, ten persons of different religious traditions associating together for a common task can be a worthy venture. Yet, if no effort is made to involve the churches of these participants, the ecumenical task of advancing unity among the churches as corporate bodies remains unfulfilled. Ironically even boards of directors of council of churches frequently suffer from this malady, since the individual participants often do not "carry the message back" to the churches which they represent. Individuals have a cooperative experience, but the institutional life of the churches remains unaffected. A corporate ecumenism includes the collaboration of individuals, but also involves a meshing of the interest and programs of the participating institutions.

Structural differences among denominations also complicate cooperative endeavors. On a state level, geographical boundaries of judicatories differ - from perhaps a half-state to six states, thereby exacerbating the task of finding common interests. Determining parallel sources of power (Who has the authority to decide what) is a prime ingredient in common decision-making, but it is a difficult task at best among the various church polities. In a local council of churches, simply finding a common time for meetings among representatives of churches with different, self-determined schedules, can require skillful negotiations. Finally, since denominations and local churches often have very different priorities, identifying the areas of overlap for working together is rarely easy.

B. Denominational Introversion

Robert Lee noted in 1960: "Ecumenicity has modified the spirit, if not the form or structure of the denominations."[22] Denominational triumphalism certainly has declined in recent decades, but the forms and structures, as well as the internal lives and expectations, continue to frustrate ecumenical efforts at all levels. Unitive factors, especially the need for coordinated action to confront potent social evils, can be outweighed by divisive forces.

Councils or conferences of churches reflect the problems of their members, that is, local churches or denominations. Many religious bodies, especially among those who tend to function ecumenically, are experiencing losses in funds and membership. Inseparably linked to their members, ecumenical institutions tend to rise and fall with the fortunes of

these members.

When denominational structures, locally or regionally, are threatened by important losses, internal retrenchment may occur and ecumenism suffers. Conciliar bodies are perceived as luxuries or options; they are not perceived as basic to denominational survival. Thus they often experience disproportionate reductions in support from their benefactors/members. Ecumenism, far down the line in the hierarchy of priorities in denominations/local churches, simply cannot compete when the primary needs of these church bodies appear to be at stake.

Loyalty dilemmas between ecumenism and denominationalism usually are resolved in favor of the latter. In a local church, for example, the clergy person, conscious that vocational advancement comes basically as a consequence of denominational achievements, may focus all attention on the maintenance and growth of the parish, claiming that time and talents are not available for "outside" activities. Some even will be possessive of the best leaders in the parish, lest the conciliar structure siphon talents which will be useful to the local churches.[23] Obviously, some elements of competition for money and members are part of this syndrome.

Denominational headquarters may, in fact, stimulate these local expressions of introversion, unless they actively express and advocate ecumenical involvement. Leadership within the denominations, regionally and locally, which gives high-priority status to ecumenical concerns is a fundamental need of the ecumenical movement. Leadership sets the example.

Sometimes member-churches view conciliar organizations as mere service agencies valuing them more for the services or benefits they render to the churches than for the common services they offer to the community, and supporting them on a "fee for service" basis. Ecumenical agencies can and should provide many benefits to their members. Yet, when their only or primary function is seen as providing services to members, ecumenism really is being used to foster denominational separation, the antithesis of the Lund Principle. In fact, one reason why some church bodies cooperate only peripherally, if at all, may be that they assume the "service agency" model: they have no need for ecumenical benefits since their resources and powers permit them to have a false sense of self-sufficiency. Such expedient interdenominationalism which reveals a lack of ecumenical vision, has been a nemesis to many ecumenical endeavors.

A pragmatic factor also falls into the category of denominational introversion. Churches are suffering from a new parochialism, in which we go our separate ways and respond weakly to a variety of competing causes. No crusading cause, like the Vietnam War, has emerged recently to capture the energy and the power of the churches working together. Could a thriving conciliarism be partly dependent upon a major cause on which we can focus our efforts in common? A "crusade" as a form of religious revival historically has been a force of revitalization for inter-church cooperation.

C. Internal Problems

Some of the difficulties encountered by ecumenical institutions are self-imposed, internal to the life of these bodies and created by them.

More than one council of churches, for instance, has functioned as separate entity, conducting its own program in isolation from its members, or vice versa, acting as a mere service agency for its members, aiding and abetting their separate programs. In the one case, these ecumenical agencies are not sensitive to the felt needs of their constituents, whether local churches or denominations. Since their agendas are not integrated with the common agendas of their members, they may be perceived as irrelevant to the needs of these members. In the other case, in order to maintain the support of their members, some councils have become mere ecclesiastical errand-boys and are treated accordingly. They forget that one of their purposes is to be advocates for Christian unity and mission, enabling all to understand the mandate for unity in the Gospel and trying to insure that nothing is done separately which can be done together. Treading the line between these two extremes demands astute leadership.

In the preface, it was noted that a major factor in the ecumenical crisis is that conciliar bodies have lost a sense of their fundamental purposes; they have neglected their essential tasks. Many consequences flow from this loss, but a primary one is that education for ecumenism is largely absent from the church scene. Councils of churches only infrequently talk about the meaning of ecumenism, except in terms of the pragmatic virtues of cooperation. Denominations introduce ecumenical concerns on their agendas with even greater infrequency. Courses in the history and theory of ecumenism are becoming rare in theological seminaries. And when was the last time you heard a sermon on the meaning of ecumenism. The result is that the church public has lost a sense of ecumenical purpose and commitment. The vision has become dim. Reawakening that understanding and involvement is a responsibility initially of ecumenical institutions, especially councils of churches. But the goal is beyond achievement unless other religious institutions – denominations, seminaries, and local churches - participate fully in education for ecumenism.

An ecumenical movement may be necessary for ecumenical bodies! Too few ecumenical organizations are interested in cooperation and mutual assistance among themselves. Duplication, isolation, and competition sometimes prevent them from functioning with maximum impact. Ecumenical ministries at all levels cannot continue to function as isolated parts. They are interdependent. Expressing oneness and fulfilling mission require regular communication and collaboration.

Organizational factors also determine the quality of ecumenical agencies. Some ecumenical agencies lack the competent and committed leadership to perform the necessary roles properly and prudently. Some experience an "authority gap": the persons with authority or leverage in the denominational entity are not the persons who participate as decision-makers in the council of churches - a factor which hinders

common decision-making. Some have clumsy structures, such as constitutions which do not define roles and duties appropriately, thereby limiting the quality of performance. Some are geographically non-viable, requiring a larger or smaller area to be functional.[24] Many, especially in small communities, must compete with clergy associations, which function independent of the conciliar structure (if one exists at all) and which dominate the time and energy of the clergy. These factors can cause problems even when ecumenical commitment is at a high level.

D. Stages in Ecumenical Development

Some problems of ecumenical bodies may result from the churches' failure to understand or accept the stages in ecumenical development.

Thus, ironically, the major achievements in inter-religious relationships in recent years have created some difficulties for ecumenical institutions. Some persons are now resting smugly, satisfied that the ecumenical journey is virtually completed. Usually, these persons are fixated on cooperation as the final goal. They fail to realize that councils are not final destinations, but rather way stations on the ecumenical odyssey, supplying needs for stages beyond present structures.

Others may feel threatened, fearing that further ecumenical developments may threaten denominational or other interests. For example, the appeal of some pan-Protestant conciliarism in the past perhaps was based on or enhanced by an assumed need for a counterforce to Roman Catholicism. Protestant-Catholic dialogue and cooperation now reduce that appeal. Similarly, the Consultation on Church Union (COCU) reveals that negotiations for church unions are an inherent part of the ecumenical movement. Ecumenism may have reached a crucial stage: the directions are becoming clearer, and the halfhearted are showing withdrawal symptoms.

Still others are disillusioned, unaware of the accomplishment in the recent past and unwilling to devote the necessary energy to what they perceive as a lost cause. The ecumenical movement needs persistence and vigor from within if progress is to continue.

The forecasters of ecumenical doom may have misread the current religious situation. Developmentally, many ecumenical problems reflect the fact that we are in a pre-ecumenical stage, not a post-ecumenical retreat.

Ecumenical institutions clearly have problems, but problems are part - an inevitable part - of living. For the most part, the tribulations of ecumenical institutions reflect the situations of their member-bodies. In the final analysis, the ecumenical crisis is really a crisis of the churches, not only because of the factor of reflection, but also because the strength and credibility of the churches' witness is ecumenically dependent. As Dr. Eugene Carson Blake, a former denominational leader and ecumenical veteran, recently told an audience: "If the churches are to be stronger ten years from now, they

will be more ecumenical. If weaker and irrelevant, they will be sectarian and provincial.[25] If Blake is right - and we believe he is, then ecumenical renewal is imperative for the renewal of the churches.

CHAPTER IV.

SEEKING VISIBLE UNITY:

COUNCILS OF CHURCHES

A. Introduction

Ecumenism - like any other movement which wants its goals to survive and prosper - must have bodily forms. Ecumenism, in fact, takes many forms in our time, including bilateral dialogues, interchurch mergers, ad hoc coalitions, and even local prayer groups. The diversity of form is notable and laudable.

But a primary ecumenical form is still conciliarism - the council of churches movement, the process of the churches meeting in council. Conciliarism is a servant and an institutional expression of the ecumenical movement. It is certainly not the whole of the ecumenical movement, but it is a major polity and practice of organized ecumenism, a significant means of giving visible witness to our unity in Christ.

The prominence alone of conciliarism would justify extensive examination of the movement. But one of our value assumptions makes the task of examination indispensable: the council of churches moment, as an expression of an enduring covenant among many different church bodies, is potentially, if not always actually, a highly valuable instrument for maintaining a healthy ecumenism. As the old adage notes, if we did not have councils of churches, we would be forced to invent them.

Our purpose in this section is to try to answer such questions as: What are councils of churches in relation to the churches and the church, the whole Body of Christ? What ought they to be? Where do they fit in the ecumenical constellation?

Fulfilling this purpose is complicated by the diverse forms in the conciliar movement.[26] Councils of churches are many in number and they vary greatly in size, jurisdiction, and services. They may be staffed by hundreds of' professionals in Geneva or New York or by one volunteer in Newburyport. Their resources can be measured in millions of dollars or hundreds, their geographical jurisdiction may be the whole inhabited earth, a nation a region, a state, a metropolitan area, or a small town. They are called by different names – associations, alliances, conferences, federations, but mostly councils. They have vastly different programs, usually reflecting their resources and emphases, ranging from major disaster relief to the promotion of inter-confessional dialogue.

Despite significant differences, these bodies of Christian churches in council have, or should have, certain common characteristics which distinguish them from other

ecumenical structures. The World Council of Churches, the Massachusetts Council of Churches, and the Lowell Conference of Churches in essence have the same nature. Our task in this section is to discern these common or defining elements.

B. What is a Council?

What then is a council of churches? In light of the fact that all councils of churches have character flaws and failings, it is better to phrase the question differently: what should a council of churches be in order to fulfill its role in the ecumenical task?

1. Definition

A working definition can be stated as follows: A council of churches is an institutional expression of the ecumenical movement, in which representatives of separated and autonomous Christian churches[27] within a given area covenant together to become an enduring fellowship for making visible and effective the unity and mission of the Church.

Such a definition, of course, merely starts the process of understanding these structures.

2. Reflecting Division and Unity

A council of churches reflects both the division and the unity among its member-bodies.

Within the context of a council, the member-churches are autonomous, even sovereign, bodies. They exist separately and they practice the faith differently. These differences, sometimes vast, help to determine what churches can do together through a council. Some councils, for example, depending on who the members are, can celebrate the Eucharist together; others cannot. Some can press for the unionization of farm workers; others can only hold prayer meetings for migrants. Thus, the divisions in the Body of Christ are manifested in a council of churches.

Equally, however, a council reflects the unity of the Christian churches. The present manifestations of unity sometimes may be pragmatic in nature, representing little more than a sense of inadequacy in isolation for a particular purpose, such as a social witness. Such an expression of unity is "coalitional" in character, and clearly does not satisfy fully the requirements of our definition of a council. At best, however, a council represents the commitment of the member-bodies to give visible expression to the unity they now experience and to prepare for the unity which is to come.

3. Mutual Recognition

When the unity expressed in a council is theologically based, as it should be, it entails some mutual recognition among the member-bodies that they all are, in some way, related to or involved in the one Church of Jesus Christ. Theological statements or discussions on inter-church relationships often revolve around the precise ways to

describe this mutual recognition.[28] The limited form of mutual recognition practiced in a council of churches does not demand inter-communion nor the acknowledgement of others as churches in a "full and true" sense. Instead, it means basically: "A council depends on the readiness of the churches to recognize each other as confessing the same Christ though this confession may take radically different forms."[29] A fundamental goal of the ecumenical movement, however, is to expand the parameters of mutual recognition, so that, in time, a common membership, a common ministry, and a common Eucharist will be a reality.

4. Anticipation of Unity

As the foregoing indicates, a council clearly does not exhaust the quest for Christian unity. Rather, it is only a beginning, a stage in a long, difficult, and painful process. A council, at its best, can be described by a number of terms - a herald, a forerunner, a prefiguration, an instrument, a foretaste, a preparation for a unity to come. As Lukas Vischer indicates:

> Real unity still lies in the future. Fellowship in the Christian council is no more than a provisional fellowship… It is fellowship on the way to unity. It brings together churches and Christians from a particular area and makes it possible for them already to have a foretaste of that full communion, already to bear Joint witness and to cooperate.[30]

A council of churches expresses the unity we have; it anticipates but does not embody the unity we seek.

5. Being Its Members

A council of churches is an instrument of its member-bodies. Basic to an understanding of a council is this dependent status. A council is not a separate and autonomous body, a supra-church with an independent structure of authority and the powers to direct the activities of its members. Nor is it a collection of individuals who function apart from the member-bodies. Instead, a council is a direct extension and agent of its members functioning interdependently. It has no existence apart from them, though they have a stronger existence because of it. One unique characteristic of a council of churches, in contrast to a variety of coalitions or consortia for religious purposes, is that a council is *bonded* to its member bodies. It *is* its members, showing visible unity through sharing in common ministries.

Being its members (the churches) means that a council is *of* the churches. It is created *by* the churches *for* their common mission in the world. It consists of representatives *from* the churches. It involves a covenant *among* the churches to stay together, to endure (quite unlike most coalitions and consortia which disband after achieving selected goals), to express and strengthen their unity and mission.

Being of and by the churches is a council's main strength and weakness. Some critics

claim that councils have arrested ecumenical development and the thereby enhanced denominationalism, since councils merely embody the self-interests of the member-denominations through the "representational principle."[31] Precisely because councils are of and by their member-bodies, because the institutions whose interests are being transcended in the uniting process are also the institutions which are represented on a council, a council is by nature a laborious process in manifesting greater unity. That is a council's weakness. Yet, the fact remains that only the churches themselves can make decisions for fuller expressions of unity and mission. Independent ecumenical groups can be the catalysts for such decisions, but they cannot decide.[32] Only the churches themselves, within the spheres of authority defined by each denomination, can make these decisions. A council is a negotiating forum and an implementing agent for these decisions by the churches. That is a council's strength.

Being of the churches means that councils should involve ambassadors of whole Christian communities. A council must take seriously the priesthood of all believers; it must incorporate representatives of all members of the Body of Christ in the government and ministry of the council. Because all Christians are ministers of reconciliation, a council should involve clergy, lay people, and denominational leaders, as well as men and women, young and old, majorities and minorities, in one body on a basis of equality in decision-making. This dynamic interweaving of persons in different church roles will expand the talents, perspectives, and convictions in a conciliar body. It will also be a visible sign that the ecumenical gift and task belong to whole Christian communities - to all Christians, not merely elites. Additionally, the equal involvement of many groupings within the churches can enhance the acceptability of the ecumenical task; the solemn decisions of ecclesiastical elites have little meaning unless rooted in the connections of the members in the households of the Lord.

Overall, the basic problem with the representational character of councils is not the principle but distortions in present practice. Representation is too narrowly interpreted and implemented. It is insufficiently inclusive to embrace the breadth of valid diversity in the churches.

Being an instrument of the churches does not necessarily deprive a council of an ability to lead the churches. Examples, of course, can be of conciliar activities which are little more than the diluted consensus of the member-bodies. Moreover, any council has structural and political difficulties if it takes an official stance which contradicts the official stances of its member-bodies, especially when the issue is one of major theological or ethical significance. Nevertheless, an abundance of evidence indicates that many councils of churches have exercised strong forms of leadership. In fact, a common criticism of councils is that they have led too forcefully, especially on social issues. This leadership role does not contradict the instrumental nature of councils, since they have been created for certain leadership purposes, namely, to express and advance the unity and mission of the Church. They are *of* the churches in order to speak *to* the churches. Hence, councils can be and must be forceful advocates for

Christian unity and witness - though, frankly, with a political sense which guides them in determining the practical bounds at a particular time.

6. Churchly Status

A council lives in continuous tension between being perceived as a church and being separated from the churches. A council can never be a church nor can it function apart from the churches.

As an agency of the churches, a council is in some sense a part of the Church. But that ecclesiastical reality can be understood only in terms of the concept of *being* its members. The churchly status or "ecclesiological significance" of a council is a derivation, a reflection, of its relationships to its members. A council participates in the reality of the Church of Christ through these relationships, through being the churches in communion with one another.

Though a council obviously lacks some of the standard characteristics of churches (such as "apostolicity," the authority to ordain, or congregations), it possesses others: notably, the presence of the Holy Spirit can be discernible in the life and work of a council, and a Christian ministry can be evident in a council's structures and functions. A council at its best is a fellowship of churches deliberating and acting in the name of Christ, a fellowship in which its members experience a oneness with one another which brings them closer to their Lord.[33] A council can be a provisional manifestation of the Church of Christ in its wholeness. It is not a church or the Church, but the Church can be present in the churches working together through a council.

At least one ecumenical interpreter has claimed that councils are an essential and integral instrument of the Church in any given region. Without "properly functioning" councils or their equivalents, Richard Rousseau maintains, it is questionable whether a regional manifestation of the whole Church - the churches together seeking oneness in mission - has a present reality.[34] Rousseau's point is a question worthy of serious consideration.

C. What A Council Is Not

Some other organizational forms exist which resemble, even parallel, councils of churches. Often, it is said or assumed that these structures are the functional equivalents of councils - that is, they can adequately perform the roles or replace the structures of councils. The roles of councils of churches, it is claimed by some, are not needed, when these other organizational forms exist. Certainly these other forms have performed some useful, even indispensable, services. The roles they play should be valued as necessary for the full flowering of the ecumenical movement. Nonetheless, they lack certain essential ingredients to replace completely the structure and functions of councils. To better understand the nature and appreciate the values of conciliar bodies, it is helpful to view them in contrast to other organizational forms.

1. Interfaith Organizations

The equivalent of a council of churches is not an interfaith organization, generally a structure incorporating Christian and Jewish congregations. Interfaith dialogue to promote mutual understanding and respect should be encouraged and established in every community. Equally, Jewish and Christian bodies, reflecting the common elements in their heritages and purposes, should seek to cooperate whenever possible in areas of common interest. In fact, the opportunities for interfaith cooperation are far greater than generally practiced or assumed. Nevertheless, whenever an interfaith body becomes a substitute for an ecumenical body, the basic ecumenical task of making visible and effective the unity and mission of the Church of Jesus Christ is hindered or halted. The same problem arises, of course, whenever Christian and secular bodies form a common structure.

The solution is not easy. Two organizations, one ecumenical and the other interfaith, are rarely feasible in a community. In some cases, a joint commission between a Christian council and Jewish congregations can be an effective vehicle for dialogue and cooperation. But whatever the solution, the ecumenical mandate of the Gospel must remain intact, and the relations between Christians and Jews, and neighbors of all faiths, must be enhanced.[35]

2. Clergy Association/Leader's Conference

The equivalent of a council of churches is not an alliance of clergy or a conference of denominational leaders. Personal relationships among clergy in a local community or heads of church bodies are extremely important for ecumenical advance. The trust and mutual respect engendered can strengthen significantly the possibilities of institutional ties. These personal relationships among leaders normally do not develop by accident. They usually emerge by design, and are strengthened in regular meetings on a peer basis. Thus, clergy associations or conferences of church leaders are valuable components in the ecumenical mix.

These peer relationships, however, cannot be a substitute for councils of churches. One major strength of the conciliar movement traditionally is its incorporation of clergy, laity, and bishop-types into one body on a basis of equality. As we noted, such a dynamic interaction of different church roles has not only expanded the talents and perspectives available to conciliar bodies, but has also been a visible sign that the ecumenical gift and task involve w*hole* Christian communities, not merely key segments. These values must be preserved.

Church leaders must meet together on a peer basis, but not at the expense of a conciliar body - as sometimes occurs when strong clergy associations dominate the time and energy of these leaders, hampering or even preventing conciliar work. If a parallel existence between leadership conferences and conciliar bodies is not feasible in a given place, then one practical solution to a complex problem may be to make the

leadership group a part of, a committee or program unit in, the coniliar body. Imaginative tactics can resolve many difficulties. In any case, leadership groups serve an important ecumenical role, but they lose one reason for being when they become a substitute, rather than a stimulus, for relations among both the clergy and the lay people of the churches.

3. Independent Ecumenical Groups

The equivalent of a council of churches is not a group of ecumenicallv-minded individuals or an inter-religious coalition for a particular purpose. A great variety of ecumenical groups exist beyond the confines of councils of churches or the churches themselves. Generally, these are groups of individual Christians gathered together for ecumenical prayer, dialogue, service and/or action. The vast majority of these independent groups are significant supplements to institutionalized forms of ecumenism. They can be a means of expressing a variety of ecumenical concerns. They can become evangelists and catalysts for ecumenism in the churches. They can be vehicles for creative experimentation, beyond the possibilities of official bodies. Sometimes they can even keep the official agencies honest, by challenging conciliar bureaucracies which violate ecumenical integrity by severing the unity from the mission of the Church.

An important role of conciliar bodies, as advocates for and servants of ecumenism, is precisely to foster independent expressions of the ecumenical mandate. Insofar as these groups function as pioneers for the churches, they render valuable services. They are dysfunctional when they seek to become replacements for a conciliar movement *of* the churches; they cannot (unless they become councils of churches by another name) be a substitute for the conciliar covenant *among* the churches.

The whole of the ecumenical task cannot be placed upon conciliar organizations. The task is too great to be confined to institutions or to a single institutional form. A variety of ecumenical endeavors is necessary to supplement and prod the official efforts.

D. Defining a Basis

A conciliar body needs a theological basis or statement of purpose to define its reasons for being. A basis is not a doctrinal test, a confession, or a creed; it is a formula expressing the "foundation of collaboration."[36] It determines the range of the fellowship, and defines what binds the group together. In fact, if a basis is not defined explicitly, it exists implicitly, causing confusion about parameters and the nature of the institution.

Defining the basis, however, can in itself be a troublesome task. Most councils of churches have faced problems in defining their bases. The difficulty is that the formula must not be so broad that it meaninglessly includes virtually all religious groups, nor so narrow that it excludes genuine segments of the Christian community. Compromises, therefore, often occur after lengthy debate. In Massachusetts, for example, a number of

councils have faced the dilemma that some members could not accept a strictly Trinitarian or Christocentric statement of purpose while others have insisted on one. This dilemma generated considerable discussion and has been at least temporarily resolved in some councils, including the Massachusetts Council of Churches, by two levels of membership: a Christocentric formula as the primary basis and an undefined category of "other churches."[37] Such a basis for being can be acceptable so long as the fundamental tasks of an ecumenical body are not hindered or prevented.

Even the best-developed theological basis will not insure the participation of some Christian churches in a given council. For theological or practical reasons, some Christian churches cannot participate at this time in certain conciliar bodies or activities. The fact must be accepted with sensitive understanding and with openness for the future. A conciliar body must insure that its theological basis and its structure are not irrelevantly preventing the participation of some Christian churches. But assuming such a hindrance is not present, a council of churches must persistently extend a hand of fellowship, a standing invitation, a variety of opportunities, to those churches which cannot now participate. A council of churches cannot be satisfied with a mere unity of congeniality, such as pan-Protestantism. It must pray and work now for the time when all churches which genuinely name Christ as Lord will be joined together.

E. The One Church as Conciliar Fellowship

A council of churches is a conciliar fellowship. But recently the World Council of Churches, following the lead of its Faith and Order Commission meeting in Salamanca in 1973, described the one Church which we seek also as a conciliar fellowship.[38] The two uses of the term are clearly not synonymous, but neither are they incompatible. In both cases, presumably, the term "conciliar" refers to meeting and deciding in council.

The full organic unity, sketched in earlier statements and reports of the World Council of Churches, received a further elaboration in an approving statement from the Fifth Assembly of the Council in 1975:

> The one Church is to be envisioned as a *conciliar fellowship* of local churches[39] which are themselves truly united. In this *conciliar fellowship,* each local church possesses, in communion with the others, the fullness of catholicity, witnesses to the same apostolic faith, and therefore recognizes the others as belonging to the same Church of Christ and guided by the same Spirit. As the New Delhi Assembly pointed out, they are bound together because they have received the same baptism and share in the same Eucharist; they recognize each other's members and ministries. They are one in their commitment to confess the gospel of Christ by proclamation and service to the world. To this end, each church aims at maintaining sustained and sustaining relationships with her sister churches, expressed in *conciliar gatherings* whenever required for the fulfillment of their common calling.[40]

This intentionally ambiguous conception of the one Church will be discussed among theologians for years to come in order to clarify and elaborate its meanings. For our purposes, however, the most important point is that the one, undivided church is visibly expressed when representatives of churches which are truly united and in full communion with one another meet together in council.[41] Certainly, present conciliar bodies do not manifest the full unity described in the Salamanca conception. Present conciliar fellowships are sovereign churches meeting in council. In this sense, the present situation is "preconciliar."

The very fact that the model for the one Church is conciliar fellowship is not only evidence for a renewed appreciation of the conciliar movement, but also represents a new and greater responsibility for conciliar structures. A compliment becomes a duty. Present councils must be "a preparation for and a prefiguration of" the ecumenical council to be.[42] The goal of a Council of churches can be described as making itself obsolete. Councils must be heralds, advance agents, of the unity to come - a unity which will make present conciliar models irrelevant. Councils have long been viable means for expressing the ecumenical mandate of the Gospel, but the Salamanca conception of unity gives greatly added weight to this viability. To fulfill their newfound tasks, however, requires reformation in the conciliar movement. The marks of that reformation are the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER V.

MARKS OF A TRULY ECUMENICAL BODY

The faithful Church of Christ is in process of constant reformation, in response to the judgments of God and for the purposes of God.[43] The ecumenical movement, as an instrument of the Church of Christ, is itself an expression of reformation - responding to God's call for the unity and mission of the Church. The ecumenical movement, however, is also in need of reformation - repenting of corruptions and renewing of fidelity. This chapter is an attempt to outline the identifying marks of an ecumenical body "truly reformed and reforming."

A council of churches is not necessarily an ecumenical body. It should be. It can be, but it is not so by definition. A council of churches which is a truly ecumenical body[44] is defined here as one which intentionally attempts to function as a forerunner of a greater Church unity and which seeks to fulfill in programs and activities the fundamental purposes of the Church which the member-bodies hold in common.

The characteristics which specify the meaning of the above definition can be called the marks or signs of a truly ecumenical council of churches. Some of these marks are listed below. Few councils, if any, show all of these marks and no council perfectly fulfills any one of them.

These marks are, in effect, the goals or tasks of an ecumenical body. They provide the

criteria by which councils of churches can evaluate and reform their structures and functions.

Five of the marks - shared worship, dialogue, ecumenical advocacy, evangelism, and social mission - are derived from the nature and mission of the Christian Church. The other four - cooperation, representativeness, effective organization, and conciliar interdependence - are derivations of ecumenical politv, the nature of the ecumenical process. The marks, however, interpenetrate in many ways.

A. Shared Worship

An ecumenical body, as part of the church , participates in and encourages regular acts of scriptural study, common prayer, and worship. Our life together is of God, and it must be nourished and expressed in common praise, thanksgiving, repentance, and hearing the Word.

Once-a-year acts of common worship, such as at Thanksgiving or during the Octave for Christian Unity, are valuable but quite insufficient. They can become a form of ecumenical tokenism. Some form of shared worship beyond a scriptural quote and an invocation should be an important part of every gathering in an ecumenical body. Shared worship, in fact, should be a regular part of the life together of diverse Christian bodies in every community, in order to show and strengthen our unity.

The forms and theology of worship differ significantly among Christian bodies, and therefore are not only a reflection but also can be a cause of our disunity. We must be painfully aware that not every form of worship is acceptable to all Christian bodies; some forms presently must be avoided in an ecumenical context in order to avoid giving offense. Tragically and ironically, the form of worship which many Christians regard as the sacrament of unity, the Eucharist, is the one which most vividly separates us from on another.

In this context, the task of an ecumenical body is twofold. First, a council must promote understanding of and mutual respect for the many differences in forms of worship. Our different form ranging from services of silence to eucharistic celebrations reflect the multitude of ways in which the Sprit of God can be received and glorified. Each tradition has an abundance to learn from and to give to other traditions. Second, a council should seek creative, practical ways for shared worship among its member bodies, in order to overcome some of our sense of separation from one another. Ecumenical worship need not be a bland dilution. The possibilities of incorporating magnificent old forms and creating new forms are immense; we are limited only by our imaginations and by the demand for consistency with God’s truth.

Such shared worship will be an effective sign of and a stimulus to reconciliation in the Body of Christ.

B. Dialogue

An ecumenical body serves as a forum for inter-religious dialogue to promote understanding, respect, and sometimes even resolution of the theological and ethical issues separating the Christian Churches.

One traditional tendency in the conciliar movement has been to by-pass or leap over the issues which divide the churches, and to concentrate our energies on matters which bring us together (for example, the maxim: "Doctrine divides, but service unites"). The effect of this tendency is to prevent or hinder a further growth in church unity, because it limits the possibilities of growth in mutual theological understanding, and overlooks the theological bases of practical works of service and action in each of our traditions.

Dialogue in and through an ecumenical body provides the opportunity to share perspectives on God's truth, to overcome suspicions and prejudices, to develop mutual understanding and respect, to grow in trust and love, to find common grounds within our divisions, to appreciate the diversity of God's gifts, and even to resolve some of our differences**.** Certain issues today - such as abortion, the Eucharist, the nature of authority and ministry - clearly divide, but precisely because they divide, they should be key items on the ecumenical agenda. Whatever separates Christian churches from one another, whether it be doctrinal or cultural, deserves serious consideration as part of the ecumenical agenda. The ecumenical mission is advanced only if we confront our differences in open and honest, even tense and frustrating, dialogue.

An ecumenical body will encourage dialogue not only among member-bodies, but between the member-bodies and other communities of faith, both Christian and non-Christian.

Always, it must be remembered that dialogue does not mean a compromise or sacrifice of truth. It means, rather, the opportunity to grow in understanding the truth, and to grow in love despite disagreements about the truth. Dialogue is a means to reconciliation.

C. Ecumenical Advocacy

An ecumenical body is a strong advocate for the goal of Christian unity. It seeks a clear theological understanding of its nature and purposes, and it attempts to promote such understanding among the people of God through all its programs, so that all Christians understand the mandate of oneness in the Gospel and so that nothing is done separately which can be done together.

A truly ecumenical body is deeply immersed in education for ecumenism, and seeks to reawaken that educational responsibility in other religious institutions, including local parishes, denominations, and seminaries.

An ecumenical body formulates a clear ecumenical rationale for all its programs, and seeks to maintain consistency between foundations and functions throughout the life of its programs. Otherwise, program, rather than the advancement of Christian oneness and mission, becomes the primary thrust.

As an advocate, an ecumenical body seeks to promote an understanding of and a commitment to ecumenism. This task may require prodding, persuading, even provoking, but a council is not serving as an ecumenical body unless it is standing in judgment on the separatistic impulses in the churches and interpreting to these churches the ecumenical implications of the Gospel of reconciliation.

D. Evangelism

The Church is instructed to "make disciples of all nations" (Mathew 28:19), and to be His witnesses to "the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8). An ecumenical body, deriving its nature from the churches which constitute it, shares in the task of proclaiming the good news in Christ. A primary function of the Church in all its manifestations, including ecumenical, is the task of evangelism - bearing witness to the saving power of God, and calling people to repentance, faith, and discipleship.

An ecumenical body's whole being should be permeated by the divine command to be an evangelist, a messenger to announce the love and judgment of God, a herald proclaiming the Gospel of reconciliation (II Corinthians 5:18-20). Every program in an ecumenical council will be kept under scrutiny to insure that the purposes of evangelism are served, consistent with other requirements of faithfulness. Social action is not at odds with evangelism. Rather, social action should be an expression of discipleship; it is a response to the call to bear witness to God's concern for social affairs.

The specific forms of evangelism will vary with the customs of the times and places of an ecumenical body. Equally, the theological formulations for proclaiming the good news will be dependent upon the combination of member-bodies in a council. Nonetheless, the essential task of evangelism for an ecumenical body will continue everywhere and always the same.

E. Social Mission

As part of the Church which bears witness, in word and deed, to the redeeming love of God in Christ, an ecumenical body will provide whatever witnessing services are possible and feasible in the community of which it is a part. Such acts of service might include a counseling center, an assistance program for the elderly, or a shared visitation program to hospitals and homes. All are valid expressions of the Church as caring servant, of the healing and helping ministry. The possibilities, however, differ from place to place. Because of geographical jurisdiction, some councils cannot engage in such direct and personal services.

One responsibility of servanthood to the world, however, falls upon all ecumenical bodies - namely, social mission. An ecumenical body participates in a strong prophetic witness. It knows that the church's unity in Christ, the message of reconciliation, is not merely for the sake of the Church, but for the sake of the world. An ecumenical body knows that the one Church, as a herald for the God who is revealed in scripture (Isaiah

1:10-17, Amos 5:21-27, Matthew 25:31f., etc.) and tradition as commanding justice in the relationships of individuals and societies, has a duty of faith to be involved, socially and politically, where human rights and well-being are decided. An ecumenical body, therefore, knows that social action - the quest for justice - is an essential arena for the churches together to express the love and judgment of God, especially in an age when political and economic "systems" dominate the lives of persons.

The Church, as a responsive agent to a Lord who directs us to "let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream" (Amos 5:24), feels compelled to heed the call of God in the screams for help from all corners. The Church cannot ignore social problems any more than personal needs. Human beings are so entangled in the web of society that it is often impossible to revitalize the lives of individuals without transforming the society. To show mercy often entails doing justice.

A hiatus, tragically, exists between social action and Christian ethics because so much social action in the churches has reflected cultural ideology more than Christian theology. For an ecumenical body, social action will be built on a clear and articulated theological and ethical base, so that the rationale for ecumenical involvement and the mandate of the Gospel will be more widely and clearly understood.

When possible, ecumenical bodies will work coalitionally with other religious and secular organizations, in order to increase the chances for effective action and to express the unity of humanity for which the church is a sign.

The ecumenical enterprise loses part of its reason for being if it abandons a strong social witness, one of today's fundamental forms of mission, for the sake of a weak unity. We dare not de-emphasize one of the very reasons for which we seek unity. We seek unity for faithfulness in mission, and despite the agonizing conflicts between contributions and commitments, we must express our unity in mission.

F. Cooperation

An ecumenical body prays and works for a time when councils of churches will no longer be necessary, when the churches will be the one Church of Jesus Christ, united in our diversity. But it accepts unapologetically the crying need for an interim solution, namely, expressing the churches' unity in Christ as fully and visibly as possible through cooperation - joint planning, mutual counsel, and common programming.

An ecumenical body takes seriously the Lund Principle (Lund, Third World Conference on Faith and Order, 1952): Churches should "act together in all matters except those in which deep differences of conviction compel them to act separately." An ecumenical body is alert to the possibility that cooperation can be used as an excuse, a conscience salver, to hinder the further unity we seek. It has no illusions, furthermore, that cooperation satisfies fully the demands of the Gospel. It, nonetheless, knows that through cooperation, an ecumenical council can carry churches to a deeper fellowship,

to a readiness for fuller unity. It knows, finally, that obedience to the Lund Principle is still a hope which requires profound efforts to fulfill, while we are simultaneously seeking resolution on the matters of conscience which hinder greater cooperation.

Cooperation, whatever its limitations, is a highly significant value, and an ecumenical body will seek to expand cooperation among member and non-member bodies, as an expression of our common obedience to God. Cooperation through an ecumenical structure is a sign that the church is one despite its splintered existence. Thus, an ecumenical body, through cooperation among its members, is a tentative manifestation of the Church of Christ in its wholeness.

G. Representatives

A truly ecumenical body is *of* the churches. It is not merely a collection or coalition of committed individuals (though it should be always at least that). Instead, an ecumenical body has a representational character; it consists, in its decision-making structures, mainly of persons who are officially appointed or elected to the council, and who derive their authority from the churches of which they are a part. At-large participants with special qualities, commitments, or skills are a welcome addition to any council, but the representatives of the churches constitute that body's defining core. Representativeness is a primary characteristic in the polity of a truly ecumenical council of churches, since it is its members showing unity in Christ through sharing in common ministries.

For good or ill, an ecumenical body's programs and policies will reflect its representational character. It will always be limited by the tolerance levels of its member bodies for particular expressions of the unity and mission of the Church. Nevertheless, a truly ecumenical body will never be deprived of a leadership capacity, because it has been created to exercise leadership in advancing the unity and mission of the Church.

Representativeness also means that a truly ecumenical body will incorporate the diversity of the Body of Christ in its government and ministry, as a visible sign that the ecumenical gift and task belong to entire Christian communities - not only to the ordained and consecrated.

Representativeness also means that an ecumenical council of churches is a form of institutional ecumenism. A council will stimulate various forms of individualistic or spontaneous ecumenism in which individuals of different religious traditions come together for common causes or interests. These important ecumenical expressions can be valuable catalysts in the decisions of the churches. Yet, an ecumenical body's primary organizational focus will be the institutions of the churches. Its main intent is to mesh the interests and functions of the institutions, to promote the greater unity and the more effective mission of the churches together.

H. Effective Organization

Christianity is an incarnational faith. Hence like Christian churches, an ecumenical body

knows that a merely "spiritual" unity is a great inadequacy. Ecumenical good will is necessary but insufficient, and withers without institutional care. The ecumenical spirit requires flesh, a strong body, an organized structure carefully nurtured through adequate funding and competent participation, in order for the ecumenical mandate to survive and prosper.

Any movement requires a structure. Being an ecumenical body requires an organization, no matter how simple, which can make all in each place one. Different working forms are needed in different places, because what works in one place may not work in another. Shape must follow functions. Equally, no institutional form is final; all are tentative, in need of continual reform to maintain faithfulness to the Gospel and responsiveness to the times. Moreover, an organized structure only rarely means a major bureaucracy. A simple form - which involves little more than a constitution defining the covenant properly, and complemented by vigorous commitment and wise administration among the participating churches - may be all that is necessary in many places. Whatever the nature and functions of an ecumenical organization, however, it must have the resources and vitality to make visible and effective the unity and mission of the Church in its place.

I. Conciliar Interdependence

The call to manifest oneness is not limited to churches; it extends to ecumenical structures in their relationships with one another. An ecumenical body, therefore, lives and works in a relationship of interdependence with other ecumenical organizations, at regional, state, national and international levels. The unity of the Church, as the concept of conciliar fellowship makes clear, is both local and universal.

A truly ecumenical body knows that expressing our oneness and fulfilling our mission demand regular communication and collaboration among ecumenical organizations. Though organizationally autonomous to satisfy different needs in different places, these diverse ecumenical forms are interdependent. A state council of churches, for instance, cannot function with maximum impact unless it is in close alliance with local councils which operate effectively - and vice versa. Equally, conciliar organizations will foster and ally with other concrete forms of ecumenism, such as bilateral or multi-lateral dialogues, church union endeavors, and independent ecumenical groups. The present weaknesses of ecumenical institutions are partly a consequence of isolation and competition. Strength, in contrast, is dependent upon mutual support. We are responsible for one another as part of the Body of Christ. We need a network of caring relationships, in which we learn from one another how to function more faithfully and through which we act together to enhance the unity and mission of the Church. Truly ecumenical bodies, therefore, forge linkages among themselves and with other ecumenical forms for mutual assistance and common action.

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The marks of an ecumenical body define the goals toward which an ecumenical body responsibly aspires and strives. Yet, in light of the dependent status of councils, the task of organizing and implementing ecumenism falls upon the member-bodies - that is, the local churches or denominations in a council. No ecumenical body can exist or fulfill its tasks without the ecumenical commitment of its member-bodies. *Therefore, the marks of an ecumenical body simultaneously define the ecumenical responsibilities of denominations and local churches.*

CHAPTER VI.

IN CONCLUSION

What essential message do we want to leave with councils, churches, and church people? What understandings do we want to convey or enrich? What tasks and demands do we want to highlight? What visions do we work and pray for the people of God to see? These, briefly and sharply, are our conclusions.

1. The quest of unity in the church of Christ is a grateful response to God's gift, a heeding of His call to be one as voiced in scripture and tradition. Ecumenism is an expression of Christian love, of faithfulness to a Gospel of reconciliation which demands that we embrace one another within the households of faith to be a sign of God's will for a world in harmony. We cannot proclaim reconciliation with integrity and credibility unless we live it internally. The ecumenical task, therefore, is not an option; it is a pressing imperative for all Christians. Every Christian and every church are challenged by scripture, tradition, and reason to witness effectively and consistently to the ecumenical vision.

2. We are not yet clear about the unity we ultimately seek, but we know it is a unity in diversity, following St. Paul's image of the Church as the Body of Christ and following the World Council of Churches' description of conciliar fellowship. The Church must welcome, celebrate, embody, and share all genuine diversity in the expression of the Christian faith. Equally, our pluralism must be incorporated in a vital, harmoniously functioning whole. A mutual cherishing of our diversity will be a sign of our unity.

3. Ecumenism seeks unity in mission, oneness for credible and effective witness, in both evangelism and social action, as well as in any legitimate manifestation of ministry. Unity and mission are inseparable in the ecumenical movement. Hence, the ecumenical task can be described as making visible and effective the unity and the mission of the Church. Whatever dilemmas arise between the call to be one and the call to witness, we can never abandon or de-emphasize one of our reasons for being:

fidelity and vitality in mission. To both those who claim that the only worthwhile ecumenism is cooperative action and those who insist that the only proper ecumenism is theological dialogue, we reply: Both the "life and work" and the "faith and order" movements, with constant intersection, are valid and necessary parts of ecumenical institutions. The absence of one or the other is a serious deficiency.

NO VISIBLE UNITY, NO VIABLE WITNESS!

NO VITAL MISSION, NO VALID UNITY!

4*. The ecumenical crisis is a crisis of the churches*. The present problems of the ecumenical movement, especially conciliar bodies, are largely reflections of the economic, disintegrative, and religious problems confronting the churches and society. But the ecumenical crisis is not merely an effect; it can also be a cause of further crises in the churches. If the mission of the churches, in terms of both credibility and potency of witness, is dependent upon greater ecumenical activity, then ecumenical decline will adversely affect the impact of the Christian message. Fortunately, crises can stir up imaginative initiatives and new zeal. It may be that our current crises represent God's judgments on our falterings and His call for repentant resolve. Ecumenical revival is not only a sign of but a means to Christian renewal.

5. Ecumenism suffers from a broad construction of meaning which too often allows the appearance, rather than the substance, of service to the ecumenical cause. In other words, so-called ecumenical activity is often something else, something which might not contribute to, and might even hinder, the fulfillment of the ecumenical hope. Hence, it is worth repeating our definition of ecumenism, as a measuring rod:

> *Ecumenism is the variety of efforts within and among the Christian churches to give visible expression to their unity in Jesus Christ, in response to the Holy Spirit, through diverse acts of reconciliation to heal all their divisions, and through common witness and service to the world*.

Both intentions and consequences are the critical factors. A conference on problems of aging, for instance, which brings together representatives of many religious groups to share ideas and plans for their separate programs is an interdenominational rather than an ecumenical event. Much interdenominational sharing is not ecumenical, because its primary purpose is not commonality (except by accident or indirection), but rather aiding and abetting the participants in their separateness. Creating a stronger ecumenical future requires a greater intentionality and consistency in our goals and functions. Every activity of an ecumenical entity must be subjected to the queries: Is it really ecumenical? Does it advance the cause of one Church in common witness?

6. Conciliarism – including the council of churches' movement -- is one indispensable instrument for maintaining a healthy ecumenism and should continue to be a major polity and practice in the ecumenical movement. Councils are not replaceable by clergy associations, interfaith organizations, or independent ecumenical groups, though councils should stimulate the roles and functions of such groups. Councils are not and never should be the whole of the ecumenical movement. Councils as we know them are not and never will be churches, or the Church, but the Church is present in the member-churches working together. As enduring fellowships for making visible and effective the unity and the mission of the Church, councils or equivalent structures are essential and integral parts of the Church in a region. Despite their flaws, the diminution of councils seriously hampers the ecumenical cause.

Councils must cease apologizing for and start celebrating their existence. To those who say that councils are no longer necessary, conciliar advocates must respond emphatically: You do not understand the dynamics and dilemmas of ecumenism, the needs for corporate expressions of and by the churches, the irreplaceable values of conciliarism or the consequences of demise! What alternatives do you propose? How will you fill the ecumenical vacuum or fulfill the ecumenical mandate? Why are you not a creative part of a council? Why are you not building councils when they do not exist?

7. The vision of the one church as a conciliar fellowship of churches in full communion with one another adds significantly to the awesome task of councils of churches. It is a call and a judgment. Like John the Baptist, councils must be advance agents, preparing and anticipating but not embodying the unity in mission we seek. Yet, councils too frequently have been unfaithful in little. Can they become faithful in much? Conciliar structures at times have been self-mutilating. They have tolerated, even applauded, casual commitments and tokenistic cooperation. Some have been content with errand-boy roles, isolation from one another, and organizational chaos. Many councils have lost a sense of their reasons for being, thus forgetting that they are advocates for Christian unity and mission. Many have neglected their essential tasks of enabling all to understand the mandates of the Gospel and encouraging nothing to be done separately which can be done together. To be truly ecumenical bodies, to be heralds of true conciliar fellowship, councils are in dire need of reformation. Through the power and grace of God, however, councils have the potential to be vessels of ecumenical hope for the future.

8. A fundamental need is education for ecumenism, but a fundamental lack is leadership which educates. Church participants have lost a sense of ecumenical foundations, purposes, and functions, not to mention commitments. Rekindling understanding and involvement is certainly a duty of ecumenical institutions, but the goal is beyond achievement unless other religious institutions participate fully. The role of leadership is to lead. Leaders in denominations, local churches, and theological seminaries have responsibilities to give voice and action to the ecumenical imperative. Only vigorous and persistent leadership can offset the debilitating effects of the self-

fulfilling prophets - who claim that ecumenism is dying or declining, who neither preach nor practice to regenerate ecumenical knowledge and resolve, and who then watch the fading of the vision as disinterested bystanders. We simply cannot experience a stronger ecumenical future nor be loyal to the Gospel unless we stop accepting the prevailing ecumenical pessimism with desperate silence and start creative and countervailing programs in education for ecumenism.

9.The conciliar movement must pray and work mightily for the full participation of all churches which genuinely name Christ as Lord and which accept the ecumenical task. The fact that some Christian churches cannot presently participate, for theological or practical reasons, in certain conciliar bodies or activities must be accepted with sensitivity and charity, but also with a standing invitation and a persistent presentation of opportunities to cooperate. The conciliar movement cannot exclude irrelevantly. It cannot be satisfied with a unity of the like-minded, not if it takes unity in diversity seriously. Neither, of course, can it sacrifice the essential marks which are grounded in Christian truth or essential ecumenical polity. It can and must, however, be willing to abandon cultural and customary barriers to unity. If the task of joining together in mission all churches which genuinely name Christ as Lord is to be advanced, then the conciliar movement must take every step which love demands and truth permits to remove irrelevant impediments to inclusiveness.

10. The ecumenical movement is loaded with problems but it is also motivated by the abiding hope in God's promise, presence, and tenacity. We cannot conjure illusions of well-being, but neither can we forget that, despite setbacks, the Lord faithfully will continue to pull us and to prod us in the direction of the ecumenical vision. Ecumenism is alive! It constantly will experience the trials and perplexities of living. It can be pained and crippled by infidelities. It can grow strong through dedication. Its institutional expressions can rise or fall. Its forms and shapes will change with the times. Its possibilities and opportunities during any historical period can be minimized or maximized. But it will not die! Ecumenism will thrive because the demand for unity, the imperative to be one - at peace - in love - in harmony, is near the center of meaning of the Christian faith. In the final analysis, we live in a pre-ecumenical age, not a post-ecumenical retreat,

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4 Leslie Newbigin, *The Household of God* (New York: Friendship Press, 1953), pp. 70-75.

5 See John Thomas McNeill, "The Ecumenical Idea and Efforts to Realize It, 1517-1618," in Rouse and Neill, *op*. cit., pp. 27-69

6 Forrest L. Knapp, *Church Cooperation: Dead-End Street or Highway to Unity?* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1966), p., 32.

7 Newbigin, *op. cit*., p. 161.

8 Newbigin, *op. cit*., p. 12.

9 Vischer, *op. cit.,* pp. 8, 15.

10 Report of the Section on Unity," Sec. 2. In Vischer, *op. cit*., p. 144.

11 Section II What Unity Requires," II.2, in David M. Paton, ed., Breaking Barriers: Nairobi, 1975 (London: SPCK, 1976), p. 60.

12 John MacQuarrie, *Christian Unity and Christian Diversity* (Philadelphia; Westminster, 1975), p. 2.

13 Hans Kung reminds us that the quest for unity cannot mean a sacrifice of truth, neither in "eclectic additions" nor "conciliatory subtractions." The standard for unity and diversity is the Gospel of Christ "taken as a whole." *The Church* Garden City, NY., Image Books edition, 1976), pp. 377-78.

14 Breaking Barriers, op. cit., p. 60.

15 *In Quest of a Church of Christ Uniting: An Emerging Theological Consensus* (Princeton: COCU, *(*1976), p. 14.

16 MacQuarrie, op.cit., pp. 37-38

17 In World Council of Churches, *What Unity Requires* (Geneva, Faith and Order paper, No. 77), p. 27.

18 MacQuarrie, *op. cit.,* p. 21. Also Robert T. Handy, "American Pluriformity and Growth Toward Christian Unity," *Mid-Stream*, Vol. XV, No. 4, (Octr., 1976), pp. 363-365.

19 Dean R. Hoge, *Division in the Protestant House* (Philadelphia: Westminister Press, 1976), p. 119.

20 Occasionally, ecumenical agencies have served a scapegoat function: "At worst, denominations sometimes unload their unpopular concerns on an ecumenical agency and then banish it to isolation or non-support when controversy emerges." Regionalization Study Team, *Foundations for Ecumenical Mission* (New York: National Council of Churches, 1974), p. 22.

21 Churches should "act together in all matters except those in which deep differences of conviction compel them to act separately," Sec. 3 Report of the Lund, Third World Conference on Faith and Order, 1952, in Vischer, *op. cit.,* p.

86.

22 The Social Sources of Church Unity (New York – Nashville: Abingdon, 1960), p. 193.

23 See William Cate, "Institutionalism and Ecumenical Cooperation in the Local Community." in Nils Ehrenstrom and Walter G. Muelder, eds., Institutionalism and Church Unity (New York: Association Press, 1963), pp. 358-364.

24See case study on Albany, New York in David J. Bowman, editor, U.S. Catholic Ecumenism – Ten Years Later (New York: Commission on Regional and Local Ecumenism, National Council of Churches), pp. 41-45.

25 Quoted in LaFontaine, *op. cit*., p. 50.

26 So-called "united parishes," which link local churches in some communities in common service, planning, and prayer, are the equivalent of councils of churches. In fact, they may represent a more advanced form of unity at times.

27The word "churches" here means both denominational structures and local congregations.

28 See, for instance, Vatican II, "The Decree on Ecumenism," in Walter M. Abbott, ed., *The Documents of Vatican II* (New York: The American Press, 1966), pp. 336-370.

29 Faith and Order Commission, World Council of Churches, "The Unity of the Church and the Unity of Humankind, " in What Unity Requires, op. cit., p. 8. See also "The Church, the Churches, and the World Council of Churches," (Toronto Statement, 1950): "The member churches [of the World Council of churches] recognize that the membership of the church of Christ is more inclusive than the membership of their own Church-body… The member Churches of the World Council recognize in other Churches elements of the true Church. They consider that this mutual recognition obliges them to enter into a serious conversation with each other in the hope that these elements of truth will lead to the recognition of the full truth and to unity based on the full truth." In Vischer, *A Documentary History of the Faith and Order Movement*, pp. 172-74.

30 "Christian Councils – Instruments of Ecclesial Communion," Geneva, World Consultation on Christian Councils, 1971, p. 2 (unpublished paper).

31 For a questioning of the representational principle, which calls for officially appointed representatives of the member-churches to be the primary decision-makers in a council, see Regionalization Reflection Team, "Ecumenical Insights and Issues Arising from Five Case Studies," in Commission on Regional and Local Ecumenism, National Council of Churches, *Living Ecumenism Series*, (Series 2, No. 3, April, 1977)" No doubt the representational principle causes some problems, but it is hard even to conceive of an alternative in a council of churches. Much of this chapter is, in fact, a response to the criticisms of the representational principle.

32 Some councils maintain a mix in their board of directors of official representatives from the member-churches, and at-large individuals and/or delegates from independent ecumenical groups. If functioning properly, such a mix can provide a direct catalytic effect; it can offset somewhat the problem of vested interests. The Massachusetts Council of Churches, for example, has two constitutional provisions permitting approximately one-third of its board members to serve in non-representational roles. Such provisions modify but do not violate the representational principle, since the representatives of the churches choose the additional delegates.

33 Cf, Robert T. Handy, ed., The Ecclesiological Significance of Council of churches (New York, National Council of churches, 1963), pp. 17-19.

34 "Councils of churches and Regional churches of Catholicity Redivivus," The American Ecclesiastical Review, Vol. 166, No. 5 (May, 1972), p. 342.

35. On this theme, see World Council of Churches, Nairobi Assembly, Report: Section III in Breaking Barriers, op. cit., pp. 73/75. Also, Massachusetts Council of Churches, Toward Oneness in Mission, (Boston: MCC, 1969), p. 50.

36 See H. Kruger, "The Life and Activities of the World Council of Churches," in Harold E. Fey (ed.), *A History of the Ecumenical Movement*, 1948-1968, Vol. II (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970), pp. 33/36.

37 The statement of purpose in the Constitution of the Massachusetts Council of Churches reads: "The Council is meant to further a common obedience to God in mission among its participants, hereinafter referred to as Members. Therefore, the Council shall enable the Members which confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior to manifest more clearly their unity in Him, and the Council shall enable these and other Members to come to a deeper appreciation of God's truth and to perform more fully their mission of reconciliation and renewal."

38 Breaking Barriers, op.cit., p. 60.

39 The term "local church" is intentionally ambiguous. It can mean whole "denominations" as well as local congregations. See World Council of Churches, Faith and Order Commission, "A Fellowship of Local churches Truly United" (FO/77:1, Feb., 1977, mimeograph). Also, The Ecumencial Review, Vol. 29, No. 2 (April, 1977), for articles on the different meanings in different traditions.

40 Breaking Barriers, op. cit., p.60

41. The Roman Catholic/Presbyterian and Reformed Consultation in the United States comes close to this conception of unity. The Consultation describes the shape of future unity as "a communion of communions, a church of churches." See Ecumenical Trends, Vol. 6, No. 6 (June, 1977). Many other individuals and churches have expressed similar viewpoints.

42. Address by Pere Cyrille Argenti in *What Unity Requires*, op. Cit., p. 56

43. See Consultation on Church Union, op. Cit., pp. 16-18

44 We are speaking of "truly ecumenical councils of churches" in this chapter, but we have avoided the term "ecumenical council" in order to prevent misinterpretations. In the Roman Catholic and Orthodox traditions, an Ecumenical council refers to a world-wide gathering of Christian leaders from the one Church. See Vatican Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, *Ecumenical Collaboration at the Regional, National and Local Levels* (Rome, 1975), Section 4. For an exposition on Orhtodox principles of ecumenism, see Robert G. Stephanopoulos, *Guidelines for Orthodox Christians in Ecumenical Relations* (Standing Conference of Canonical Orthodox Bishops in America, 1973).