Lukas Vischer:
Major Trends in the Life of the Churches

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2. Historical Context

Lukas Vischer served the World Council of Churches as research secretary and director of the Commission on Faith and Order from 1961 to 1979, and participated in several projects afterwards.

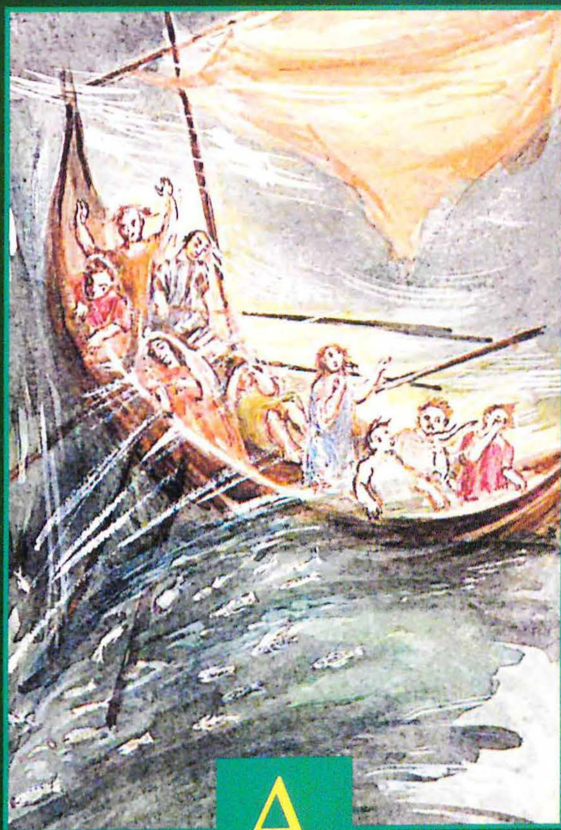
3. Summary

The decades between 1968 and 2000 saw an expansion of Protestant, Roman Catholic and Pentecostal Christianity throughout the world, while secularization diminished the membership of historic Western churches. - In the 1960s people expected the eventual arrival of a better society. The World Council of Churches launched its Programme to Combat Racism (1969) and extended this commitment to other forms of discrimination. One of the most significant developments was the feminist movement. The study on the Community of Women and Men in the Church (1978-81) and the Ecumenical Decade of the Churches in Solidarity with Women (1988-98) offered frameworks for the movement. - In the 1980s it became clear that the survival of humanity was exposed to injustice by exploitation, to extermination by war, and to self-destruction by the irresponsible use of natural resources. This insight led to the "Conciliar Process for Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation" proposed at the WCC's Vancouver Assembly 1983.

The history of the Roman Catholic Church was largely determined by the Second Vatican Council. But opposition grew along the reforms. - Among Protestant churches a major feature was the tension between ecumenical commitment and loyalty to particular church traditions. - Orthodox churches bore their witness mostly under communist or Islamic governments, with limited freedom of action. Ecumenical activities, here too, had to cope with the resistance of conservative circles. - In many places appropriate witness in political crises led to discrimination and persecution. – Along with the ecumenical activities went an ever-growing readiness in the churches for inter-religious dialogue, for practical cooperation with other religions, and common witness for peace. Vice versa, integrist movements involved the potential of violence.

The confrontation of the superpowers and differing assessments of communism led to tensions and bitter disputes within the churches. In the years following the collapse of communism, the crisis of industrial societies was deepened by an unprecedented leap in technology. In order to enter the new millennium credibly and responsibly, the churches will have to face the technological and scientific developments and will have to deal with them together.

In general, the picture emerging in the year 2000 was contradictory. On the one hand, the urgency of a new commitment of the churches was recognized on all sides. On the other hand, confusion grew so strong that traditional and even traditionalist positions were in the ascendant. The reluctance of an increasing number of Christians to face these contradictions was perhaps the greatest danger to which the churches of 2000 were left exposed.



A History of the Ecumenical Movement *Volume 3*

1968-2000

Edited by

John Briggs, Mercy Amba Oduyoye and Georges Tsetsis

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Major Trends in the Life of the Churches

Lukas Vischer

To understand the history of the ecumenical movement, we must first look at the history of the churches themselves. The ecumenical movement is inseparable from that history, which it depends on, reflects on, stands out from or even contradicts. Accordingly, we have to ask what has happened in the churches even though it is impossible to offer anything like a full account of those events. This chapter can provide only an outline of major trends. The following pages are, therefore, no more than an initial survey of the manifold strands in the history of the churches from 1968 through 2000.

A TIME OF GROWTH

The decades under review saw an expansion of Christianity, however astonishing this may sound to many people, especially in the "Christian nations" of the West. The number of Christians increased throughout the world. In the countries of East Asia, in particular, the Christian faith took root in ways never anticipated. In Korea, Christians increased from around 3 million in 1970 to more than 12 million in 1997: Christians represented by 2000 about 25 percent of the country's total population. Moreover, several thousand Korean missionaries were active in many countries. In China, the churches not only survived the period through the Cultural Revolution but emerged strengthened from persecution and repression. Thousands of churches were reopened or newly opened after 1979, when a policy of toleration of religion was restored. Estimates are always uncertain, but it is safe to say that the increase in the number of Christians in China was proportionally considerably greater than the growth in population. Similar developments may be observed in other parts of the world, too. The number of Christians rose significantly in Indonesia and India as well as in African countries such as Nigeria and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The Roman Catholic Church undoubtedly saw the largest overall increase. The Second Vatican Council strengthened the church's position in the southern hemisphere. Reforms, especially in liturgy, laid the foundations for a new self-confidence on the part of local Catholic churches. In many countries, those churches came to play an important role in national integration; where disintegration and insecurity prevailed, the stability proper to the Roman Catholic Church as a worldwide community exerted immense

• This text was translated from the original German by John Cumming.

drawing power. Its consistent witness for justice was, in many places, a source of appeal among the disadvantaged and oppressed.

This growth is certainly not restricted to the Roman Catholic Church. In both Korea and China, for example, Protestant churches in particular had grown and continued to grow. Protestant missionary work, mainly "evangelical", bore fruit in many parts of the world. But the most powerful growth in the non-Roman Catholic sphere was experienced by Pentecostalism – in the widest sense of the word. In many countries this was not only the largest but the most rapidly developing non-Roman Catholic religious community. This growth occurred in many different forms since Pentecostal spirituality was not confined to communities organized as Pentecostal churches. It was also the decisive characteristic of several spontaneous and independent movements, especially in Africa and Latin America. In the shape of the charismatic movement, it found a place in the mainline churches, especially Anglican and Roman Catholic. Informed observers believe that the number of persons identified as Pentecostalists by 2000 may be estimated at more than 300 million.

A quite different course was to be observed in the Western churches. Almost without exception, the membership of the historic churches diminished in the last three decades of the second millenium. Identification with Christian tradition had clearly receded. The idea of "Christian nations", always somewhat dubious, had become close to meaningless. Secularization, with its general acceptance of modern values and attitudes, made the churches de facto minorities and the proclamation of the gospel became a defensive activity. The venerable "drapery" inherited from the past no longer fit the situation of the historic churches. Their influence on public life was contracting, and the need in more than one Western country to redefine and restructure church-state relationships was certainly not accidental. Trends towards the privatization of religious life intensified. Informal modes of religious life and practice were increasingly evident, and society as a whole seemed ever more prone to a proliferation of religious movements and communities extending all the way to sects and secret societies.

The tendency to identify less and less with ecclesiastical tradition did not exclude the possibility of new breakthroughs. Precisely because their witness no longer evoked an automatic response, wide circles within the churches were increasingly aware of their missionary vocation. The rising number of committed groups – whether monastic communities or movements committed to specific causes – showed the gospel's extraordinary capacity to inspire alternative ways of life even, indeed precisely, in secularized societies. The longing for another kind of life found expression in large assemblies of young people such as the German *Kirchentag* or popular pilgrimages to Taizé or Santiago de Compostela.

Yet the part now played by conservative movements in almost all Western churches may have come to be more characteristic of the late 20th-century situation. Conservative options had become more attractive, many people feeling that tradition, whatever its actual form, was a source of certainty and credibility. Conservative movements, to be sure, did not see themselves merely as defending traditional values but, like the evangelical movement, sought faithfully to witness to the gospel both in their own countries and throughout the world.

Things were different in Eastern Europe in these decades. The churches were repressed, and their witness was severely impeded under communist regimes. Yet they represented one of the few institutions able to survive as relatively independent bodies. For many people, therefore, they were symbols of resistance to the state's totalitarian

grip on society. The collapse of the communist system created an entirely new situation. Whereas many in both East and West had assumed that the secularization of society in the East was the result of coercion and governmental constraint, it was now clear that the effect of secularization on society went much deeper than that. Henceforth, the challenges posed by modern society to the churches had to be confronted on a new level.

All this implies a considerable shift of emphasis in the Christian world. Churches in Africa, Asia and Latin America were by the year 2000 numerically in the majority; they were also sources of new and creative initiatives. Western theology and church life no longer showed the way. Increasingly, Christianity has become polycentric and theology has taken on a wide variety of forms. Having to face up to their own particular context led churches to adopt new approaches to both theological reflection and ecclesiastical practice.

WHAT CAN WE HOPE FOR?

The general expectation in the 1960s was the eventual arrival of a new and better society. Though social change inevitably required victims, the ongoing struggle was expected to lead in the end to horizons filled with promise. New technologies and a steady increase in the production of goods appeared to guarantee an ever-greater degree of universal well-being. This confidence in technological and industrial development was common to both rival ideological systems, adverse critics of the systems generally making the same assumptions. The civil-rights movement in the US seemed to prove that society could indeed be changed. Similarly, the vision offered by the 1968 revolts and demonstrations in France and other European countries relied on an assumption that a new division of power was within the realm of possibility. The dark forces blocking the way to a favourable outcome of historical progress could be vanquished, if only imagination was granted access to power.

Step by step, this confidence eroded in the following decades. It became clear that injustice has much deeper roots than many had suspected. Above all, it was found necessary to scrutinize and suspect technological and industrial development. At the end of the 20th-century, as Western Christians looked back, many asked whether the entire course society had taken since the 1950s had to be completely reconsidered.

The favourite theme of the 1950s and 1960s was development. The technological, industrial and, therefore, economic development of the Northern nations was to be universalized. Justice was to be realized by giving the "underdeveloped" countries a share of the good things that comprised the new well-being. The churches, including the World Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Church, also dedicated themselves to this project. But the obstacles in its way soon became all too harshly evident. The North-South divide between rich and poor nations showed no signs of narrowing; indeed, it grew wider. Initiatives for structural change proved illusory. Revolutionary movements that tried to force changes were suppressed by military dictatorships. Even when individual countries, particularly in Eastern Asia, leaped to the level of industrial nations, the structure of economic dependence was not broken. It was made worse by the growing indebtedness of the poor countries in the 1970s and 1980s. Moreover, in those decades people once again – as in the 1950s – became conscious of the danger of a third world war waged with nuclear weapons. The armaments race between the superpowers, legitimized by the theory of mutual deterrence, exacerbated the worst possible fears. In these circumstances, not only commitment to justice but witness for peace

became increasing concerns of the churches. Détente between the superpowers became a necessity if the human race was to be prevented from destroying itself. The churches – mainly in Western countries – played an active part in peace initiatives of all kinds. Awareness of the ecological crisis took longer to penetrate the churches. Only in the 1980s did it become clear that the survival of humanity was fundamentally exposed to a threefold danger: injustice by exploitation, extermination by war, and self-destruction by irresponsible use of natural resources. If the churches were to perceive and act on their responsibilities, they had to bear witness on all three fronts. This insight was behind the movement for "Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation" proposed at the WCC's Vancouver assembly (1983).

From the 1970s onwards, comprehensive prospects for the future proved less and less plausible. Christian witness was increasingly faced with a complex range of contradictory forces. Injustice was deeply inscribed in "structures of sin". To a great extent, therefore, Christian commitment became participation in specific movements: the struggle against apartheid, solidarity with liberation movements, the defence of the rights of Indigenous Peoples and identification with the poor and oppressed who were trying to break out of their bondage. The great Christian figures of these decades were people who inspired such movements of protest and solidarity: Dom Helder Camara, Mother Teresa, Dom Evaristo Arns, Desmond Tutu and C.H. Kao.

Many Christians lost their lives in this struggle without seeing their commitment bear fruit. As was true of the 20th century in general, the last decades of the century were a time redolent with the blood of martyrs. In many places and in very diverse contexts Christians, and not only Christians, paid with their lives for their witness and commitment to justice. To mention only three names: under Idi Amin's dictatorship in Uganda the Anglican Archbishop Janani Luwum was killed; under Mengistu's Marxist regime in Ethiopia Gudima Tumsa, the general secretary of the Mekane Yesu Church, "disappeared"; and in 1980 in El Salvador, Archbishop Oscar Romero was assassinated by a "death squad" while celebrating mass.

Human rights became an increasingly significant issue in the 1970s. If a comprehensive transformation of the social order was unattainable, protection of at least the most fundamental rights had to be secured. In the early 1960s Amnesty International was founded and gained wide acceptance, especially in the Western world.

These changes in people's expectations also may be detected in the development of theology. In the 1960s the theology of revolution made its appearance. It was concerned with the part played by the Christian tradition in the overall transformation of social conditions. At the beginning of the 1970s this was followed by theologies which tried to articulate the hopes and protests of specific oppressed groups in the light of the gospel – for example, black theology in the US and minjung theology in Korea. The Latin American theology of liberation, first formulated by Gustavo Gutiérrez in 1971, tried to demonstrate the potential of the gospel in situations of repression. In doing so, it opened the way for an identification of the church with those who are bereft of freedom. Because of this perspective, liberation theology awakened a response far beyond the confines of Latin America. In the 1980s, increasingly, critics asked to what extent liberation could be seen as an historical project for the forseeable future. Were we really living in a time of revolutionary renewal? More and more frequently, theologians suggested that attention should not focus exclusively on the prospect of an exodus from oppression, but that it was necessary also to recognize the enduring ambivalence of history – change may be delayed. There was need for developing "a culture of waiting for justice" (Juan Luis Segundo).

DEVELOPMENTS IN THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

The history of the Roman Catholic Church in the last three decades was largely determined by the Second Vatican Council and its decrees. The most important change probably came in reforms of the liturgy. These reforms were given priority both in the conciliar procedures and in their reception throughout the church: introduction of the vernacular, refocusing of the mass as a communal eucharistic celebration and, above all, growing participation of the faithful in worship. The Bible, now almost everywhere translated into the vernacular – often on an ecumenical basis – was given a new weight in the life of the church. The role of the laity was expressed in new forms of parish life such as the base communities developed in Latin America.

Bishops conferences began to exercise a much more independent role. In several countries national synods met to put the decisions into effect. Latin American bishops arranged continental meetings at which attempts were made to elicit the implications of the Council for the continent (Medellín 1968; Puebla 1979). In several countries, during the 1970s and 1980s, the bishops conferences became full members of national councils of churches.

The style of Roman Catholic theological reflection was profoundly affected by these developments. Whereas, before the Council, theology sought to reproduce the official doctrine of the church in as faithful a manner as possible, the task of theology was now increasingly seen as reflecting in the light of the gospel on the realities of each context. Acculturation became a privileged topic of Roman Catholic theology. Liberation theology broke new methodological ground by its emphasis on the perception and analysis of the Latin American social and political context.

For many, the image of the church changed within a short time. Instead of a system in which doctrine and practice were defined down to the last detail, a church emerged that saw itself as a community in the making. A Catholicism closed in on itself was seen as dissolving into a number of "Catholicisms". All at once, wide debate and experimentation became present. Many looked on Vatican II as merely a beginning, and it was hoped that large unresolved issues would be brought closer to decisions taken in the spirit of the Council. Free discussion on problems such as married priests, the ordination of women, divorce and birth control opened up. Indeed, it became possible even to raise such prohibited doctrinal topics as the infallibility of the pope. A rich variety of theological publications appeared. The journal *Concilium* deserves special mention. In 1967, *A New Catechism*, authorized by the Roman Catholic Church in the Netherlands, provoked wide debate. Reformulation of doctrine in the light of today's world appeared on the agenda of many.

However, as reform began to affect dimensions of the church's life, opposition grew. An increasing number of voices declared illegitimate the idea of "a church on the way". The Council, according to this viewpoint, had been concluded, and its results had now to be applied in accordance with the norms of previously approved and interpreted traditions. Both among laity and hierarchy, there was a reaction against the "unrestrained will to change". It would be a mistake to dismiss this counter-tendency simply as obscurantism, intellectual narrow-mindedness or political conservatism. Movements such as Opus Dei and the schismatic ultra-traditionalism of Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre were shaped by intellectual and political notions of earlier centuries. In general, however, these counter-tendencies were a matter of loyalty to the church in its traditional form. These critics asked if, in the reforms, values had been lost which hitherto had been regarded as essential. Did an arbitrary treatment of tradition not inevitably result in the

loss of uniformity? And was that not precisely what had been the strength of the Roman Catholic Church in the past? Increasing emphasis was placed on these questions, especially when renewal began to lead to signs of disintegration. The number of priests and religious diminished. Declining church attendance in Western countries led many people to think that the process of reform was leading to a profound crisis.

Roman pontificates since the Council have been marked by tensions between the renewal of church life and the reinforcement of tradition. After Vatican II, popes had the difficult task of keeping the mutually opposed forces together in the same church. They tried to achieve this by ensuring a credible continuation of the Council, on the one hand, and doing justice to the need for continuity in the life of the church, on the other. The papal office was marked by new characteristics. In contradistinction to previous popes, the successors of John XXIII were eager to interpret their task as one of trying to present themselves to church and world as dynamic symbols of unity. "Pastoral visits" to all parts of the world have become a permanent feature especially of the peripatetic John Paul II. However strong the tendency of the Council to see the pope primarily as the bishop of Rome, in late 20th-century dialogue he had, at least at a symbolic level, become a "universal bishop" to a degree never before witnessed, while the prestige of the papal symbol had grown considerably in public opinion.

Paul VI sought to promote the Council's pastoral instructions, and norms of implementation were published for most of the decrees. His encyclical *Populorum Progressio* ("Development of Peoples", 1967) spoke emphatically of the need for worldwide solidarity with the countries of the South. Through a series of international synods, he attempted to pursue debates of Vatican II. A synod on evangelization (1975) led to the publication of an important document which in many respects went beyond the Council's decree on the missionary activity of the church. The new "Ostpolitik", the attempt to normalize relations with communist regimes in Eastern Europe, was also his initiative.

Yet Paul VI also constantly drew attention to traditional teachings and practices of the church. In 1968 he caused a stormy debate in church and society with his encyclical *Humanae Vitae* ("Regulation of Birth"). With the aim of preventing any impression of discontinuity in the exercise of the papal *magisterium*, he spoke out against all forms of artificial birth control. To counteract decay in devotion to the Virgin Mary, in 1974 he reaffirmed traditional Marian dogmas in a special apostolic injunction. The last years of his pontificate saw a proliferation of reprimands to theologians who, in the eyes of the Vatican's Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, had overstepped the bounds of permissible teaching.

Despite such measures, many felt that Paul VI was too weak and indecisive. At the end of 1978 John Paul II was elected pope. After a long period, the church now had a non-Italian pope who was an extremely dynamic and robust personality. He continued the dual approach of his predecessor, though with new emphases. He was primarily concerned to affirm in new ways the presence and witness of the Roman Catholic Church throughout the world.

On the one hand, he sought to give the church a new thrust through the way in which he actually exercised his office. In a series of encyclicals he tried to give a new orientation to the social witness of the church. As the former archbishop of a church under communist domination in Poland, he wanted to strengthen the determination to survive, and even more the active witness of the churches under communist oppression. Particularly impressive in this respect were his several visits to Poland and in 1998 to Cuba. Alongside his unequivocal rejection of all forms of Marxism, he was equally

unsparing in his criticism of Western materialism and lack of solidarity. This double papal witness evoked an enormous response, especially at the level of politics and in the media.

On the other hand, from the outset the pope had been concerned to preserve traditional Roman Catholic teaching and order. He quickly put an end to further discussion of papal infallibility by the condemnation in December 1979 of Hans Küng, the Tübingen theologian. Other such condemnations followed. In September 1984 the Latin American theology of liberation was subjected to official criticism. Classical Roman Catholic teaching on sexual issues was reaffirmed on every possible occasion. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* was published in English in 1992, a summary account of teaching and ethics in which new approaches developed since the Vatican Council received only scant consideration. Scarcely less important was the papal policy in filling vacancies so that as many dioceses as possible were given to bishops committed to conservative leadership. The first of these two won as much approval as the second evoked criticism. In Western countries in particular, papal policy led occasionally to open protest and even rebellion.

The unity of the Christian churches remained an explicit objective under both Paul VI and John Paul II. A long list of papal declarations testified to the Holy See's desire to move closer to the goal made explicit by Vatican II of reconciliation between divided Christian traditions. Official dialogues, reciprocal visits and symbolic gestures were intended to remove obstacles. Yet a certain asymmetry predominated with other churches. The clarification of their relations was an issue of prime importance for their own self-understanding, but ecumenical dialogue had far less existential significance for the Catholic church. Its primary concern was quite clearly its own witness. Basically, it assumed that the ecumenical movement must finally lead to an integration of all churches into the one Catholic church.

The role of the pope was of particular significance in this context. The Roman Catholic Church considered both the doctrine and the institution of the papacy as not merely essential; it was convinced that the unity of the church could be realized *only* under the authority of the successor of Peter. Conscious of the fact that this doctrine was unacceptable to other churches, the theme was avoided in official contacts in the first years after Vatican II. Theological conversations on a ministry of unity within Christianity began only in the 1970s. A new stage was reached with the publication in 1995 of the encyclical *Ut Unum Sint* ("On Commitment to Ecumenism"). This pronouncement offered an open ecumenical dialogue regarding the papal office. In reality, however, it soon became clear that the potential for such a discussion was limited. The debate was not to call into question the institution as such; instead, it should suggest alternative forms of its exercise. In this respect, the numerous colloquies which have been called in response to the encyclical had little actual impact. In consequence, the non-Roman churches faced the question of the extent to which they were prepared, for the sake of Christian unity, to make use of the papal ministry in its historical form.

As open as the Catholic church was to dialogue and exchange, it was equally reticent with regard to all forms of collaboration which might call into question its claim to uniqueness. At the end of the 1960s, the Holy See briefly considered membership in the WCC but soon concluded that it was out of the question. Projects of common witness which were bound to engage the Roman Catholic Church at the international level had little chance of being accepted. In the late 1960s the joint programme on Society, Development and Peace (SODEPAX) raised high hopes but they were not fulfilled and it was

discontinued in 1980. After the Vancouver assembly in 1983, the WCC proposed a "conciliar process for justice, peace and the integrity of creation" but the Catholic church refused to co-sponsor the initiative.

The unresolved tensions which characterized Roman Catholic ecumenism were particularly manifest in the way in which the holy year 2000 was conceived and celebrated. Since the holy year 1975, hope had been expressed that the transition into the third millennium would provide a common witness of all Christian churches. Despite all efforts and appeals, this hope did not materialize. The year was used by the Catholic church for its own witness and the traditional framework, including the practice of indulgences, was maintained. A few impressive manifestations gave the year a certain splendour, but these were overshadowed by traditional positions. These included the beatification of Pope Pius IX, but above all Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger's letter, explicitly approved by John Paul II, *Dominus Iesus:* On the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church", underlining limits to ecumenism. Although criticism of this document was sharp and sometimes harsh, even within the Catholic Church, the fact remained that the common witness of divided Christendom was still far from being solved.

CHURCHES OF THE REFORMATION, THE EVANGELICAL MOVEMENT AND PENTECOSTAL CHURCHES

In the last few decades, the image of the Protestant world changed no less profoundly than that of the Roman Catholic. Indeed, this period may be described as one of self-discovery as Protestant churches posed key questions of themselves. What does it mean to be the church of Jesus Christ? What is the task of the Protestant churches in the context of present-day challenges? How, in terms of changed relations between the churches, are we to interpret the meaning of the Reformation and the manifold traditions that derive from it? Such questions provoked intense controversies and answers proved anything but uniform, both theologically and ecclesially. The image of the Protestant world at the beginning of the new millennium was more diversified than ever before. A reinvigorated evangelical movement consolidated old battle-lines, and the rise of Pentecostalism added new promontories to the contours of the Protestant world.

A major feature was the tension between commitment to the ecumenical movement and loyalty to particular church traditions. Several Protestant churches experienced something of the greater community in the ecumenical movement. In the early days, many Christians hoped that the foundation of the World Council of Churches might in the foreseeable future put an end to the division of the churches. Answers to the major challenges of the time were sought in the context of a more inclusive community.

This expectation was, however, increasingly called into question in the course of the 1960s. It became ever more obvious that unity would not be reached as soon as anticipated, and that the churches would have to work out their own answers. Several Protestant churches set about this task and tried theologically to translate the inherited faith into contemporary confessions. Attempts at such statements were made, for example, in North America by the United Presbyterian Church (1967), the Reformed Church in America (1974) and the Presbyterian Church in Canada (1984).

Vatican II created a new situation for the Protestant churches. Dialogue, exchanges and cooperation were soon taken for granted in many places. The ecumenical community began to be extended beyond the membership of the WCC. But the ecumenical opening of Vatican II was more than an invitation to cooperation. It represented a

challenge to the self-understanding of the Protestant churches. How far was it necessary to re-examine and revise earlier Protestant positions in view of the new formulations of the Council? To answer such questions appropriately, it became essential to revisit one's own tradition.

Consequently, the commitment of Protestant churches to the ecumenical movement became much more complex. On the one hand, they continued to acknowledge their indebtedness to the vision that had taken visible form in the WCC and they still looked on its assemblies as major events. Suggestions emerging from discussions within the framework of the WCC were taken up by various churches and could result in pointed controversies. At the same time, churches found themselves increasingly forced to have recourse to their own traditions, and to develop them in dialogue with other churches, especially the Roman Catholic Church.

The participation of the Roman Catholic Church in ecumenical encounters also had structural consequences for Protestant churches. It led to an increased significance and role of the international confessional associations, the so-called Christian World Communions (CWCs). In the 1940s and 1950s, these associations did not play a major role. The WCC was not conceived as a fellowship of world confessional families but intentionally as a council of national or regional churches. But now these communions became active partners in relation to the Catholic church and thus took on increased weight also within their own constituencies. General assemblies of confessional groups became occasions to articulate specific identities in an ecumenically responsible way. The first world communions to enter into dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church were the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) and the worldwide Anglican communion. Others soon followed. A wide network of bilateral conversations came into existence. Most dialogues resulted in partial agreements. The most spectacular breakthrough with the Catholic church was achieved by the Lutheran World Federation with the adoption in 1999 of a Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification. Justification had been the central theme of the 16th-century Lutheran Reformation. Though the text created atmospherically a new situation between the two traditions, it did not lead to immediate steps towards full communion. Unreconciled divergences in the understanding of the nature of the church continued to block further progress.

Efforts to consolidate unity among the Protestant churches continued and bore fruit. In 1970 the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) and the International Congregationalist Council united. In 1973 the Lutheran, Reformed and United churches of continental Europe, with the adoption of the Leuenberg agreement, declared full communion. Though this step did not immediately have spectacular consequences, it placed the long-term relations of the churches of the Reformation in Europe on a new footing. At the beginning of the 1990s the Evangelical-Methodist churches also joined the agreement and in 1997 a comparable Lutheran-Reformed agreement, called "A Formula of Agreement", was adopted in the US. Moreover, the formation of united churches continued in these last three decades: the Church of North India (1970), the Church of Pakistan (1970), the Church of Bangladesh (1971), the Church of Christ in Zaire (1971), the Uniting Church in Australia (1977), the United Church of Belgium (1979), the United Reformed Church UK (1972) and the United Church in Jamaica and the Cayman Islands (1992). In spite of all obstacles, efforts within the framework of the Consultation on Church Union (COCU) in the US never faltered and by 2000 led to tangible results at least in some areas of the life of the nine church bodies involved. With the implosion of communism in Europe in 1989, an almost natural consequence was a European

evangelical assembly held in Budapest in 1992 to assess the common witness that was now required of Protestant churches.

On the whole, the Protestant churches of the southern continents faced other questions. Their concern was not primarily to open up denominational identity for the ecumenical movement. The question of the relationship between the legacy received from Western missions and local traditions was more to the fore. For many Protestant churches of the South, the last three decades of the century proved to be the "second phase of independence". After achieving structural independence, they now had to determine their places in their own cultural and political environments in order to develop credible forms of witness. The theological work carried out in this connection was substantial, its effects being felt far beyond confessional boundaries. Several churches experienced new vitality. In many places appropriate witness in political crises led to discrimination and persecution. New confessions of faith were produced in individual churches. The Belhar confession of the (Coloured) Uniting Church of South Africa (1986-90) was an especially impressive example of a new form of confession of faith. Yet the process of attaining authentic self-awareness had by no means been achieved everywhere. Some churches remained embedded in received traditions without the inner freedom and creativity required for credible witness. In general, the continuing divisions of the Protestant churches had a paralyzing effect.

Protestantism's image was decisively co-determined by conservative movements which had always been opposed to the ecumenical movement. The influence of fundamentalism in the narrower sense of the word had on the whole tended to recede. Even in conservative circles, movements such as Carl McIntyre's International Council of Christian Churches (ICCC) met with rejection by century's end. The constantly repeated summons to leave the godless world, the premillennialist expectation of the end, the overall avoidance of contacts with "unbelievers" and therefore with the ecumenical movement, as well as militant anti-communism, lost their attraction and found acceptance only in ever smaller groups. The evangelical movement, however, experienced a remarkable upturn in the three decades from 1970 to 2000. Given the upheavals of the period, it proved increasingly attractive, not least of all because it explicitly demarcated itself from the fundamentalist tendency. Conservative forces in Protestantism were disturbed by a perception of dissolution of the Christian message by liberal theology and catholicizing tendencies. Evangelicalism had stood for an uncompromising recognition of the authority of the Bible, emphatically rejecting any "watering down" of the truth by ecumenical considerations. However, it concentrated particularly on fulfilling its missionary commitment.

The evangelical movement took on decisive vigour in the 1960s, initially in the US when that country was unsettled both internally and externally. In 1976, Jimmy Carter, who referred to himself as an evangelical, was elected president and the evangelical influence became an important factor in forming political opinion. Whereas some historical churches adopted critical attitudes to some government policies, the evangelical movement left little or no room for doubt concerning the vocation of the country. It was able to confirm its position in public life under subsequent presidents, especially Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush.

Even though it had strong roots in the US, the evangelical movement was not a solely American phenomenon. The International Congress on World Evangelization inspired by Billy Graham (Lausanne 1974) made this clear. Evangelicals from all over the world assembled to re-commit themselves to the evangelization of the nations. They agreed on

the Lausanne covenant, a short text summarizing the main evangelical tenets and outlining the great common task of reaching the 2.7 billion people to whom the gospel had not yet been proclaimed. Although the congress distanced itself from the ecumenical movement, it avoided explicit polemics. It sought to establish as wide a basis as possible that would prove amenable to Evangelicals of every provenance and, above all, conservative forces from the churches of the South. In subsequent years the movement also became increasingly open to social and political considerations. In 1989 a second and even more representative world conference was held at Manila under the theme "Proclaim Christ Until He Comes".

In many respects the evangelical movement adhered to the revivalist tradition of the 19th century. It considered revival convictions indispensable and sought to renew them in present-day contexts. It accepted that its goals could not be attained without polarization. The unity of the church was a secondary consideration for evangelical Christians.

In these same decades the Pentecostal movement spread just as effectively as did the evangelical. It experienced rapid growth in many forms in almost all countries and developed into a global phenomenon within a short period of time. Its vitality was demonstrated at major international gatherings – Dallas 1970; Seoul 1973; London 1976; Vancouver 1979; Nairobi 1982; Zurich 1985; Singapore 1989. Pentecostalism's real effectiveness, however, was most evident at the local level. The movement shared the basic convictions of the evangelical movement, yet was distinct from it in that its hallmark was the direct experience of the Spirit. For this reason, traditional Protestantism –the historic churches and the evangelical movement – often treated Pentecostal spirituality with scepticism and mistrust. In its manifestations they saw an uncontrolled and therefore dangerous exaggeration of the emotional side of religion. But they, too, overlooked the reason for the movement's actual strength: the holistic nature of devotion. Piety may draw not only on mental capacities but on the dimension of emotion, and on all human impulses that would otherwise remain untapped. The stress on personal faith, congregational life and personal mission was capable of evoking a new awareness of worth precisely in the disadvantaged and oppressed.

It is hard to say whether Pentecostalism can really be classified as a form of Protestantism, or whether it represents a new way of being Christian. Even though it has its roots in the Protestant world, it has in the form of the charismatic movement also found acceptance in Roman Catholic circles. It definitely has affinities with the Protestant tradition, yet there has been constant disagreement there about the movement's message. Several churches divided over the question of the significance of experiencing the Spirit. On the other hand, in many countries Pentecostal churches are beginning to approximate more traditional Protestants, in both teaching and practice. Some Pentecostal bodies have become members of councils of churches, including the WCC. Reformed or Presbyterian theology especially has been accepted and is being developed in some Pentecostal churches.

The African Independent Churches (AICs) constitute a comparable case. In more than one respect they can be assimilated into the Pentecostal movement. But at the same time they have very different – social, political and cultural – roots and therefore represent a phenomenon that is *sui generis*. During the closing decades of the 20th century they acquired new weight in many African countries. While in the past they were considered to be on the fringe of Christianity, they were increasingly recognized as partners in the ecumenical movement and played a key role in the debate concerning the future of Christian thinking and witness on the African continent. The changing attitudes

found expression in new designations. In order to underline the African character of these groups, they had come to be called African Instituted (Independent) Churches (AIC).

DEVELOPMENTS IN THE ORTHODOX CHURCH

Orthodoxy bore Christian witness under difficult external conditions over the last three decades of the 20th century. Most Orthodox churches had only limited space in which to operate freely, and this put a strain on mutual relations and made joint initiatives difficult.

The Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, commanding a dwindling minority in Turkey itself, had only limited freedom of action. The Cyprus conflict of 1974 increased tension between the Orthodox church and the Turkish regime. However, through the support of the diaspora which belongs to its jurisdiction, the Patriarchate was able to fulfil its role for the whole of Orthodoxy. The Orthodox churches in the Soviet Union, Romania, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Poland and Czechoslovakia lived under communist governments, and their witness was systematically obstructed by the state. The Orthodox church of Albania was entirely dissolved in the regime's radical policy on religion. The ancient church of the Middle East, no less than Muslims and Jews of the region, sought to maintain faith and community in a particularly violent era. The Church of Greece had to cope with a military dictatorship and conflicts with a secularized government about its historic rights in Greek society.

It is all the more surprising, therefore, that the efforts of the Ecumenical Patriarchate to bring about pan-Orthodox union made slow but continual progress in these decades. Four pan-Orthodox conferences were held in the 1960s. Far-reaching resolutions were passed at the fourth of these conferences, which took place in 1968 in the newly-opened Orthodox centre of the Ecumenical Patriarchate at Chambésy, near Geneva. The churches agreed then that a serious start should be made on preparations for a great and holy council of the Orthodox church and set up at Chambésy a permanent secretariat to implement the project. The fourth pan-Orthodox conference also established a basis for common witness by the Orthodox churches in the ecumenical movement.

Vigorous inter-Orthodox work now began. An agenda for the future council was confirmed at Chambésy in 1976. At a second pan-Orthodox pre-conciliar conference, six years later, it became evident that very little progress was being made, the only real outcome being approval of a text on impediments to marriage. In 1986, however, the third conference reached agreement on four texts: fasting, bilateral conversations with other church traditions, the role of Orthodoxy in the ecumenical movement, and the Orthodox churches' contribution to peace. The complex questions of the date of Easter, the Orthodox diaspora, the proclamation of autocephaly and autonomy, and diptychs (the ranking of Orthodox churches in reciprocal intercession) had to be left open.

The ecclesial status of the Orthodox diaspora, a matter of great urgency, remained controversial. Since the 19th century, and especially since the beginning of the 20th, Orthodoxy spread far beyond the bounds of the "East". Orthodox mission churches were founded in some African countries (Kenya, Uganda and Zaire). Above all, Orthodox minorities came into existence as a result of migration to Western countries. What was their status? Under whose authority could national Orthodox churches be formed in such countries? However strong the desire to reach agreement about these questions, it was obvious that a solution could be reached only in stages. In 1993 an inter-Orthodox

conciliar preparatory commission proposed that the bishops of the different minorities should form national or regional conferences and work within this framework towards a more comprehensive solution.

The part played by the Orthodox churches in the ecumenical movement took on new features. The fourth pan-Orthodox conference of 1968 did a great deal to promote bilateral dialogue with other Christian traditions. Inter-Orthodox commissions were founded for official dialogues with Anglicans, Old Catholics, Oriental Orthodox, Lutherans and, later, Reformed churches. Official discussions with the Roman Catholic Church were especially significant. After some delays, these talks began in 1980 and continued, despite obstacles that have arisen over the years. For the relationship between the Orthodox and the Roman Catholic Church mutual visits were of great significance, perhaps more so than the formal dialogue. Following his first meeting with Patriarch Athenagoras, the ecumenical patriarch, in Jerusalem in 1964, Pope Paul VI visited Constantinople in 1966, as did John Paul II in 1979. In the course of these years almost all Orthodox patriarchs paid visits to the Roman see. Papal and patriarchal visits were exchanged in 1967. In the last years of the millennium the pope began to extend his visiting programme to countries which are traditionally considered to be Orthodox – Romania 1999, Georgia 1999, Greece 2001, Ukraine 2001.

Through all this, the preconciliar process and, especially, the ecumenical activities of the Orthodox churches had to cope with the resistance of conservative circles in their churches. Loyalty to tradition was certainly characteristic of the spirituality of the Orthodox church, to an even greater extent than in the churches of the West. Therefore it was scarcely surprising that the monks of Mount Athos, for instance, constantly objected to innovations of all kinds. But the conservative tendency in individual churches also had other roots. During the years of persecution, the preservation of tradition was a condition for survival in some churches. This indicates the specific value of national considerations in the Orthodox churches. Whereas conservative opposition remained more in the background in the 1970s and 1980s, it became increasingly evident after the demise of communism in Europe in 1989.

Against this background, it was not surprising that after 1989 Orthodox participation in the life and witness of the WCC was increasingly called into question. Since the foundation of the WCC, the role of the Orthodox churches in the ecumenical movement had been a recurrent theme. What were the implications for the Orthodox church, which considers itself to be the true church, to have communion with other Christian traditions? Both in the context of the third preconciliar conference of 1986 and at other assemblies, the special status of the Orthodox church was emphasized. At the same time more scope for its witness in the community of the WCC was requested. However severe their criticisms, the Orthodox churches remained faithful to the ecumenical vision underlying the WCC. The situation, however, deteriorated in the 1990s. In 1997 the patriarch of the Georgian Orthodox Church was forced by conservatives, especially from monastic circles, to withdraw the church from both the WCC and the Conference of European Churches. The Bulgarian Church took the same decision. By the time of the WCC's eighth assembly (Harare 1998) and the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the WCC, there was widespread fear that the ecumenical fellowship could break apart. However, the commitment of the Orthodox churches to the ecumenical movement prevailed. After Harare, a mixed commission of persons from the Orthodox churches and other WCC member churches went to work, seeking to lay the ground for a viable relationship within the ecumenical fellowship.

Planning for the great and holy synod was also affected by tensions between individual Orthodox churches, especially between the Patriarchates of Moscow and Constantinople. After joining the ecumenical movement at the start of the 1960s, the Russian Orthodox Church began to play an increasingly active role in international relations. With the agreement of Soviet authorities, it developed its own ecumenical programme and its significance in the life of the ecumenical organizations grew. It increasingly established relationships with particular churches. For instance, regular bilateral talks ensued between the Russian Orthodox Church and the Evangelical Church in Germany, and later several meetings were held with representatives of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the US. But Russian Orthodoxy also tried to make its influence felt within the communion of the Orthodox churches themselves. At the beginning of the 1970s, the decision of the Moscow Patriarchate to grant autonomy to the Orthodox churches of America and Japan led to conflict, since in the eyes of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople this decision ran counter to traditional canonical regulations. For some years, strained relations made communication extremely difficult.

With the end of the Soviet Union the Russian Orthodox Church had to face new conflicts. Certain Orthodox communities that had been under the jurisdiction of Moscow were now part of independent states. Old disputes were revived as these new situations arose, particularly in the Ukraine and Estonia. In the Ukraine several churches were established – one recognizing the jurisdiction of the Moscow Patriarchate, another claiming the status of autocephaly and a third recognizing the authority of the Roman Catholic see. The wish of the Orthodox church in Estonia to be received into the jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarchate also led to a sharp conflict between Moscow and Constantinople.

The Oriental Orthodox churches found themselves in a perhaps even more complicated situation in the last three decades. The Coptic Orthodox Church in Egypt was subjected to increasing pressure from the Islamic majority, at the same time experiencing deep spiritual renewal. In order to avoid open religious conflicts, President Anwar Sadat put Coptic Pope Shenouda III under house arrest in 1980. The Ethiopian Orthodox church lost its privileges after the fall of Emperor Haile Selassie to a Marxist regime at the beginning of the 1970s. It had to find an entirely new role in Ethiopian society. The Armenian Orthodox church continued to be divided into the catholicosate of Etchmiadzin in the former Soviet republic of Armenia and the catholicosate of Antelias in Lebanon. The two jurisdictions separated largely for political reasons, which also resulted in severe tensions in the Armenian diaspora. In 1970, a split occurred in the Syrian Orthodox church in India: in order to relate more credibly to its own Indian context, part of the church in India withdrew from the jurisdiction of the patriarch in Syria, which led to a conflict lasting several years.

Plans for closer cooperation among the Oriental Orthodox churches that had been proposed in the 1960s could scarcely develop under these circumstances. The fact that the dialogue between the Eastern and Oriental Orthodox churches was not only maintained but gradually drew closer to the stated goal of union was all the more promising. A mixed theological commission met four times between 1985 and 1993. After it had proved possible to formulate a common theological declaration at the second assembly in 1989, an explicit agreement was reached on the central disputed question of Christology in the following year. On the whole, that agreement met with a favourable response in churches on both sides. Reactions, comments and criticisms were treated at the fourth meeting in 1993 and by the century's end it had become a matter of

implementing the agreement. But a certain rapprochement of the two families of churches had already occurred, and there was some reason to hope that further steps would be taken in the foreseeable future.

THE CHURCHES IN THE EAST-WEST CONFLICT

During the period under review, the confrontation of the superpowers impinged decisively on the life of the churches. In many respects, the churches' witness was determined by the way they viewed the conflict. Differing assessments of communism within the churches often resulted in tensions and led to bitter disputes.

With a few exceptions, the common assumption was that the ideological and political situation which had emerged from the second world war would for an indefinite time be an unchangeable fact of life; the confrontation between the two systems was bound to last. Of course, the relationship might change and the face of communism might take on new features, but neither side thought that the Eastern system would come to an end. The major concern was the danger of a military confrontation – a third world war in which there would no victors but only losers. Accordingly, everything had to be done to prevent such an escalation of the conflict. From the 1960s on, the view dominated that a modus vivendi had to be found that would both avoid war and not harm the integrity of these systems – at least for the time being. It was necessary to promote and extend the peaceful coexistence of mutually opposed systems. This vision found political and institutional expression and scope in the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe established at Helsinki in 1973. This conference reduced the risk of warlike conflicts and above all provided a framework for an international debate on the protection of human rights in both East and West. The reliability of the Helsinki agreement, however, was ultimately thought to owe less to the partners' readiness for peace than to "mutual deterrence", military preparedness on both sides that rendered any armed action counter-productive. The question now was how to bring about a step-by-step extension of the Helsinki framework.

The churches that were forced to live under communist regimes were those primarily affected by the East-West conflict. They were faced with the task of deciding how to survive as the church of Christ under a traditionally hostile system. The cold war that characterized the first two decades after the second world war was long past, and both governments and churches were now interested in rapprochement, though for different reasons. As far as the governments were concerned, it became less a matter of persecuting than of controlling the churches and using them for their own political objectives. The churches were faced with the problem of deciding how far to go in recognizing the communist regimes without being disloyal to their own mandate. Answers differed from country to country. Some churches – the Roman Catholic Church in Poland and the Protestant churches in the German Democratic Republic – succeeded in maintaining a relatively high degree of self-determination. Other churches were forced to work much more closely with state authorities. The Russian Orthodox Church already had decades of persecution behind it and now had to defend the limited recognition it had regained as a result of the second world war against renewed waves of ideological restriction. On the whole, the life and witness of most churches in the East remained confined to the sphere of worship.

Many of these churches began to play a more active part in the international ecumenical movement. The office for external relations of the Russian Orthodox Church

became a veritable centre of international ecumenical activities during the 1970s and 1980s. The Christian Peace Conference in Prague provided a platform for Christian witness in the context of the communist world. Though officially supported by some churches, in particular the Russian Orthodox and the Czech Republic churches, its statements were received by church constituencies with reservation.

In all churches, local parishes bore the main burden of confrontation. State measures against religious life often failed at the point of decisive resistance by those members of parishes who were prepared to suffer disadvantages for the sake of the gospel. An increasing number of "dissidents" spoke out in the 1970s and 1980s. Priests, ministers, writers and scientists, encouraged by the Helsinki agreement, protested against the violation of basic human rights in their countries.

But how was the conflict between the systems viewed in the West? On the one hand, there were those for whom a constantly and clearly stated *No* to communism was the obvious duty of any Christian. On the other hand, a more nuanced understanding of things became increasingly apparent. However necessary it was to reject Marxist materialism, it was essential not to ignore the darker aspects of the Western system itself. The churches had to resist the temptation to play down inadequacies on their own side by referring to the much greater evil of communism. Above all, it was their responsibility to ward off the danger of nuclear war. Instead of mere rejection, they needed to engage in dialogue and "confidence-building". Throughout the 1970s and 1980s the WCC and the majority of its member churches represented this viewpoint. In the 1980s, it became the basis of the movement that sought to call into question the East-West conflict in the name of peace – with special success in the German Democratic Republic.

The attitude of the Roman Catholic Church had begun to change with Vatican II. Although the critique of Marxist ideology was confirmed, the Council avoided straightforward rejection and opened up the way for new relations with communist regimes. At the end of the 1970s, a new *Ostpolitik* towards the Soviet bloc became apparent at the Vatican. It was inspired by a concern for the best way to guarantee the future of the churches. The Roman Catholic Church fully supported the Helsinki agreement. Through a number of concordats, the appointment of new bishops in Eastern Europe was made possible. Rome increasingly stressed the fundamentally Christian character of Europe. John Paul II decided to engage in more dynamic witness in relation to the communist states. In 1979, shortly after his election, he visited Poland and spoke before 3.5 million people; his vigorous presence strengthened the self-confidence of all those in Eastern Europe who hoped for a better future.

The East-West conflict was perceived and experienced quite differently by the churches in the third world. The struggle for dominance between the great powers had clear ramifications for the South where a bitter contest for spheres of influence took place. The West showed its most odious side in this confrontation in terms of economic exploitation. Whoever stood for justice had to oppose the economic machinery of the dominant Western system. Marxism, on the other hand, seemed to be a source of hope. Third-world theologians resorted to Marxist philosophy in order to understand more deeply their own situation of oppression and to provide a structure for resistance by the poor and marginalized. This affinity enabled them also to see the communist regimes of Eastern Europe in another light. In their eyes, those regimes came to represent the political power that consistently supported liberation and revolution in the third world.

A further complication in this conflict occurred with the Chinese revolution. On the one hand, it created a new constellation since the conflict of the superpowers was no

longer limited to the confrontation of the US and the Soviet Union. Communism now had a new and independent centre and began to exert a considerable attraction in developing countries. On the other hand, the Chinese Cultural Revolution, with its radical suppression of all forms of religious life, awakened great concern in the churches. At the end of the 1960s and early 1970s, the fate of the churches in China appeared to be sealed. Communication was so restricted that the capacity for survival of the small Christian minority was scarcely perceptible.

The common witness of the churches was made difficult and occasionally even paralyzed by differing assessments and attitudes towards this ideological struggle. There could be sharp clashes of opinion over political developments and actual events, such as the apartheid regime in South Africa or the entry of Soviet troops into Afghanistan. In some countries, especially in the third world, actual divisions occurred within certain churches over the issue of communism and anti-communism. This debate created areas of tension between the churches which had a disastrous effect on authentic Christian witness.

JUSTICE, RACISM AND APARTHEID

A certain radicalization of the commitment to justice was a characteristic mark of church life in the last three decades of the 20th century. It had long been clear that a just order could not be established through well-meaning declarations and proposals, but the late 1960s and the 1970s made it evident that obstacles to a more just order had deeper roots than hitherto suspected. The power of economic interests was so great it could withstand all intellectual and religious pressure. The struggle for justice had to assume new features to arouse the forces needed for change.

In the 1970s violence imposed itself on the Christian conscience with increasing urgency. Can the use of force be justified when oppression and exploitation become unbearable? Is the violence in the struggle of the oppressed, or among oppressors equipped with all the resources of power? And how was the church to react to this dilemma? Inevitably, there were different answers and the 1970s were marked by bitter confrontations, especially in the West, over precisely these issues.

At the heart of the struggle for justice was racism, especially the apartheid system in South Africa. Though the churches officially rejected racism, at the end of the 1960s new dimensions of this evil became apparent. It became increasingly clear that it was impossible to count on the power of persuasive argument alone to combat racism – above all, the association between racism and economic interests was becoming evident. In 1969 the WCC launched its Programme to Combat Racism (PCR). This was an attempt by the churches to put themselves unequivocally on the side of the underprivileged and oppressed. Something of the basic tenor of those years was expressed in the following declaration:

> Our struggle is not against flesh and blood. It is against the principalities, against the powers of evil, against the deeply entrenched forces of racial prejudice and hatred... the demons operating through our social, economic and political structures. But the root of the problem is as deep as human sin and only God's love and man's dedicated response can eradicate it.

The focus of church commitment throughout these years was southern Africa, not least because there the credibility of Christian witness was at stake to a particularly high degree. However, the fight against racism also engaged other situations of oppression: the movement of the Palestinians for their own independent state; the rights of Australian

Aborigines; the Indigenous Peoples of South and Central America threatened with extinction; the marginalization of racial minorities and aboriginal peoples in the North, and so on. This overall commitment was guided by the concept of an "inclusive society", i.e. a society guaranteeing equal rights for all without exception. Accordingly, the struggle was extended to other forms of discrimination. At the beginning of the 1970s the position of the disabled in society received increasing attention. With the growing flood of refugees from the South to the industrial nations of the North, the churches' struggle began for the right of asylum in situations where people's existence was endangered by war and poverty. In the 1980s in some churches, especially in the US and Western Europe, another dimension of the inclusive society became increasingly important – the recognition of the rights of sexual minorities, gays, lesbians and others. The debate on this latter issue is far from concluded; in several churches it has been a cause of tension, even involving the risk of new divisions. Seen as a whole, the witness against injustice, against all forms of oppression, was readily accepted in the countries of the third world. For many Christians in situations of such oppression, the WCC and its various programmes became a symbol of hope – their significance and weight were perhaps sometimes even over-estimated.

Things were, however, quite different in the Western countries. The fight for worldwide justice led to polarizations in the churches during the 1970s and 1980s. The intensification of this struggle brought traditional ideas into question and created uncertainty. Many conservative circles in the churches reverted to "safe" biblical or theological positions. Above all, the perceived closeness of this new concern for justice to "communist" viewpoints awakened the fear that the churches could be exploited by communist regimes as a usefully undiscerning tool.

For many Christians in the West the commitment to justice for the underprivileged and oppressed in the third world became the point at which a critical confrontation with their social and economic system could develop. The churches in Eastern Europe, however, found themselves in a quite different situation. At the level of the international ecumenical movement, it was not difficult for them to engage in anti-racist discussions since in so doing they were in harmony with their governments' official positions. At the parish level, however, only a limited engagement with questions concerning the struggle for a society of equal rights was possible. Therefore traditional prejudices could persist without being fundamentally challenged. The collapse of the communist regimes revealed a past – even within the churches – with which no one as yet had come to terms.

The period from 1968 to 2000 certainly refined the churches' conscience in respect to justice. The struggle for the rights of the disadvantaged to some degree has borne fruit, and there is a new awareness that society must be inclusive if it is to survive. The peaceful eradication of the apartheid system showed that the struggle for a new social order is not always a hopeless undertaking. Yet it remained obvious that racism is anything but banished. It was still present in new forms which in certain respects were more difficult to assess and to deal with. Precisely because racism is "as deep as human sin", it was as difficult as sin to abolish.

THE POSITION AND WITNESS OF WOMEN

The feminist movement certainly became one of the most significant developments in the life of the churches in the last decades of the century. Its propositions and demands had a far-reaching influence. Its contribution to Christian theology was among the most creative to appear in recent years.

The beginnings of feminist theology coincided chronologically with those of liberation theology. Nevertheless, though it shared some basic assumptions and viewpoints with liberation theology, it had its own roots, topics and questions, resulting as it did from a generally new consciousness on the part of women in modern society. A new role for women, new relations between men and women and a new form of society seemed to have become possible as antiquated patriarchal structures eroded. What does this mean for the church? Will it remain a bulwark of patriarchal structures? Or will new forms of community come about within it too? Perhaps the Christian faith may even prove to be the leaven as a new reality arises?

The question of women's contributions to Christian witness within the ecumenical movement had been under discussion since the early 20th century. Christian women's organizations sought to promote women's rights in church and society. Individual women such as Sara Chakko (1905-54), Madeleine Barot (1909-95) and Kathleen Bliss (1908-89) played significant roles in the history of the WCC. After the second world war, a special secretariat on the role of the woman in church and society was established in the Council. The feminist movement as such, however, went far beyond these early initiatives. It became a matter of questioning Christian tradition and asking how far it was moulded by patriarchal ideas and continued to contribute to their maintenance. To what extent was the free development of women in the church possible? Answers varied. "Reformist" women theologians merely drew attention to hitherto hidden aspects of Christian tradition in order to make a new image of women possible. Others went farther in their criticisms, assuming that patriarchal ideas were so deeply rooted in Christian tradition that a totally new interpretation was needed. Women's hidden experience of God, and its history throughout the centuries, had to be uncovered.

This debate over the burden of tradition was soon expressed in a controversy about inclusive language. The demand was for an eradication of sexist prejudices that had taken hold of language itself. Colloquial language had to be reformed. Terms signifying "male" must no longer be used for "men and women". Moreover, the argument was extended to the ways in which people talk of God. How was it possible to redress the misunderstanding that had led to God being conceived in male terms? How was "he" to be spoken of so that women could recognize themselves, in terms of their own experience, in discourse about God?

Following the lead of pioneering thinkers like Simone de Beauvoir and their writings, most of the first feminist publications appeared in the US. For a time, it seemed possible that the movement of Christian feminism would remain restricted to North America. But it soon became evident that the movement was spreading. Variations on its propositions and demands were put forward in other countries. In many places two projects of the WCC, the study on the Community of Women and Men in the Church (1978-81) and, later, the Ecumenical Decade of the Churches in Solidarity with Women (1988-98) offered frameworks for the movement.

In some churches the situation began to change. Within a relatively short time, the number of women in church decision-making bodies increased. A major contribution to this process was made by the quota rule introduced and recommended to the churches by the WCC. New forms of non-inclusive language began to win acceptance. In some churches, hymnals and even translations of the Bible were revised on feminist lines.

The ordination of women remained a controversial issue. Even though the practice had already been adopted in many Protestant churches, more conservative churches, especially those of an evangelical persuasion, still rejected it. The question was undecided

in the Anglican church for some time. The idea of women priests remains unacceptable for the Roman Catholic Church, as well as for the Orthodox churches. Those two churches continue to feel that they must hold to the centuries-old practice of the church. They have declared that the decision of the Church of England to ordain women to the ministry (1994) was an "obstacle" to ecumenical dialogue. (The Anglican Church of Canada and the Episcopal Church in the US were officially ordaining women priests as early as 1976 and both now have fully recognized female bishops.) The highest leaders of both Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches have recorded their negative attitude in public declarations.

New developments became discernible by 2000 even in those churches that cling to traditional positions. The part played by women was growing stronger. In more and more places, for example, they shouldered the main responsibility for parishes; one need think only of the role of pastoral assistants in the Roman Catholic Church. Members of religious orders and congregations, in the past the very image of subordination, were often seen in the front ranks of the women's movement. Even though aspects of the feminist movement may be debatable, there was every reason to think by the year 2000 that changes in the life of the church which feminism has brought about had become irreversible.

FROM CONFRONTATION TO DIALOGUE AND COOPERATION

The churches' awareness of non-Christian religions had been radically transformed in the 20th century. There was an ever-growing readiness in the churches not only for inter-religious dialogue but for practical cooperation between religions. Inter-religious encounters increasingly formed part of the obvious pattern of things. A new relationship was developing. Of course, how far this was possible in the way of common endeavour with representatives of other religions remained a vexed question. Many people thought that dialogue and cooperation inevitably tended to lead to syncretism and necessarily reduced the uniqueness of the Christian message. Yet, whatever their assessment of the task and possibilities of dialogue, all parties agreed that encounters between religions must start from a more secure basis of respect and openness than in the past.

Relations with other religions had long been a central task for many churches, especially the Christian minorities in Asia. A new feature of life by 2000 was that a growing number of people in all countries were being exposed to a variety of religious expressions. Religious pluralism was now a fact of life; a whole range of religious beliefs was available in almost every nation. These also included new movements attached to one religious tradition or another, or to several traditions at the same time.

Religious convictions had historically been one cause of conflicts. Even in the late 20th century, there was no lack of violent confrontations that were religious, or at least partly religious, in origin. Integrist movements almost inevitably involved the potential of violence, and ethnic conflicts were often heightened by antagonism between religions. Modern pluralist societies were especially vulnerable in this respect since they depend on tolerance for survival. The greater the insecurity, the more frequent the outbreaks of religious enmity. The desecration of Jewish cemeteries and other institutions, like threats and the use of force against Muslims in some industrialized nations, came to be ominous examples of this tendency.

In many countries the relationship between Islam and Christianity was strained. The reasons for this varied from country to country. Certain conflicts had their origin in the

period of Christian colonial domination but they could also be due to the religious claims of Islamic states or to the quest of political power. In many places minorities – both Christian and Muslim – found themselves in precarious situations. Again and again tension exploded and led to violent confrontation. The Balkan wars were one illustration of this; Nigeria, Egypt and Indonesia have been the scene of acts of violence. Against this background many Christians tended to see in Islam a threat to the future of the church.

Nevertheless, the number of people perceiving a certain unifying power in the religious dimension of life was growing. They hoped that religions, once purged of exclusivity, would become a factor of peaceful coexistence. More and more people were experiencing a desire for an exchange of ideas and a deeper understanding of the religious aspect of existence. In Western society especially, religious eclecticism – expressed in movements such as New Age spirituality – proved increasingly attractive. A striving for agreement between religions was also one of the central concerns of Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church.

Dialogue between the churches and representatives of the Jewish people began immediately after the second world war. The failure of European churches to speak out during the period of Nazi persecution of the Jews played a major role in these initiatives. How was it possible that the churches did not immediately recognize the evil gathering over the Jewish people? The conviction that the relation of the church to Judaism had to be entirely rethought spread through broad areas of opinion, particularly in the Netherlands, Germany and later in the US. Direct dialogue with Jewish counterparts developed gradually, initially taking place at an individual church level and later in the WCC. A study document published by the WCC in 1982 reflected the growing readiness of the churches to acknowledge present-day Judaism as a God-given partner without ignoring the divergences which continue to exist. The relationship between the church and Judaism remained fragile in the late 20th century and demanded constant vigilance from both sides. Israel and Israeli policy proved especially controversial in many churches. Christian commitment to the rights of the Palestinians could easily be misunderstood as a renunciation of solidarity with Judaism.

For the Roman Catholic Church, Vatican II was the beginning of a new relationship with Judaism. The decree *Nostra Aetate* ("Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions") was promulgated in 1965 and a dialogue began in which the main questions raised were theological and spiritual. In 1986 John Paul II visited the synagogue in Rome, a symbolic step of far-reaching significance sometimes referred to as the "pope's longest journey". For a long time, relations between the Vatican and the state of Israel remained unresolved. Out of consideration for the Arab states, the Holy See greatly delayed its official recognition of the Jewish state, but this finally took place at the end of 1993.

In the 1970s and 1980s, dialogue extended far beyond Judaism. Both the Vatican, in 1964, and the WCC, in 1971, provided structures to foster relations with other religions. A long series of dialogues subsequently took place – both bilaterally with individual religions, and multilaterally with representatives of various religions at the same time. Whereas the bilateral talks were mainly concerned with promoting deeper reciprocal understanding, common commitment to peace was in the forefront in multilateral meetings. Dialogue between the Eastern Orthodox and Jews and Muslims at Chambésy was especially helpful. The Russian Orthodox Church took the initiative in arranging meetings between different religions in the area of the Soviet Union. An inter-religious service of common prayer for peace, for which the pope issued invita-

tions to Assisi in 1986, aroused special interest. In evident contrast, the letter of Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger *Dominus Iesus*, on the "unicity of the church" crafted by Opus Dei and issued in 2000, recalled the conviction of the Roman Catholic Church that in the world of multiple religions Christ was to be considered the only and unique source of salvation.

There has been a marked reinvigoration of inter-religious movements and organizations in the last few decades. The World Conference on Religion and Peace was founded at the end of the 1960s, primarily on the basis of American initiatives, with the intention of bringing representatives of different religions together in common witness for peace. It was inspired by the hope that the outgoing century would be remembered for inter-religious dialogue instead of "inter-religious disaster". A series of international assemblies was held (Kyoto 1970, Louvain 1974, Princeton 1979, Nairobi 1985, Melbourne 1989). In recent years, however, this movement seems to have lost much of its initial thrust. Clearly, a still fragile common witness for peace could not entirely cope with the complicated circumstances that arose after the fall of communism in 1989. More recent inter-religious initiatives have put common responsibility for the integrity of creation to the fore, as, for example, contacts between the World Wide Fund for Nature and representatives of various religions, or the Pax Christi conferences at Klingenthal near Strasbourg in 1995 and 1997.

However dialogue and movements may develop in particular instances, the fundamental questions remained: What does it mean to be a Christian in this fragile world which we share with other religions and convictions? How is the gospel to be proclaimed without devaluing other religious approaches and thus possibly encouraging enmity? How can the exclusivity that seems to go with Christian belief be overcome? And, conversely, how is it possible to have relations in common with the representatives of other religions without harming the identity and integrity of the Christian message? As in the past, these questions were still being answered in different ways. New interpretations of Christian faith were put forward, whereas more conservative circles maintained traditional theological and biblical views. An "either-or" approach to mission and dialogue had become one of the points of controversy between the evangelical movement and the traditional churches. Both the Congress on World Evangelization in Lausanne in 1974 and that in Manila in 1989 spoke emphatically and exclusively of Jesus Christ as the one source of salvation.

There was increasing agreement that dialogue between religions had to be pursued for the sake of the future of humanity. All constructive forces must act in concert if humanity were to overcome the dangers that threaten to overwhelm the world. Dialogue and cooperation between religions were essential parts of this process. But the task demanded more than that. When the WCC founded a secretariat for dialogue with other religions, it was correctly pointed out that not only religions but also ideologies had to come within the purview of the churches. Exchange between religions could bear fruit for the construction of a "responsible society" only if dialogue were undertaken at the same time with the secular forces which were deciding the present pace of development. Dialogue with other religions could help to clarify one's own tradition and such dialogue could also open up realities that had hitherto been obscured. Nevertheless, the nature of the contribution to dialogue to be made by the churches was not a matter of looking for salvation in the religious dimension alone, thus playing off the religious against the secular, but rather it was meant to testify to God's love in all areas of human life.

FALL OF COMMUNISM: NEW DEPARTURE FOR THE CHURCHES

The collapse of the communist regimes in Eastern Europe in 1989 was a critical turning-point for the churches too, the consequences of which are still unresolved. True, the peace movement of the 1980s was sustained by the hope that antagonisms between the two global systems would grow less intense and diminish. Yet not even the most daring of forecasts could have imagined that the *perestroika* experiment in the Soviet Union could lead to the system actually imploding. As it turned out, the breakdown of communism resulted in a shift in the distribution of power that had determined political issues since the second world war. The well-established division of the globe into first, second and third worlds became meaningless. All at once, the Western powers were confronted with a polycentric world.

The churches, too, had to face a new situation. The collapse of communism showed how profoundly their witness had been marked by four decades of ideological and political conflict. A process of reorientation was necessary. Seen as a whole, the churches in Eastern Europe had concentrated their efforts on surviving as Christian communities. In almost all countries, radical resistance to the regime was restricted to small circles of dissidents. In Poland the church, not least of all after the election of Pope John Paul II, was a real factor of resistance. In individual countries, particularly in East Germany, the churches provided opposition groups with space for alternative demonstrations.

After the fall of the communist regimes, the churches were inevitably faced with the task of confronting their past. To what extent could church leaders having served under the communist rule remain in office? What was to be done about bishops and ministers who had cooperated with the regime? Since secret archives were being opened up in some countries, facts were revealed that had remained hidden until then. In the former German Democratic Republic, in particular, it was a matter of a veritable settling of accounts with "collaborators".

Confrontation with the past was not restricted to individuals. Claims arising from injustice unresolved in the past now came into the open. Oppressed nations which had fought – often with active Western support – for minimal recognition under communist regimes, now demanded independence. In many cases, especially among the Orthodox, the churches joined in this movement. The conflicts in Armenia, Georgia, Ukraine, Estonia, Moldavia and, above all, the former Yugoslavia put the churches in an almost intolerable state of tension between commitment to peace and solidarity with one's own nation.

On Pentecost 1989, a few months before the Berlin wall came down, an all-European ecumenical assembly was held in Basel, Switzerland. It was imbued with great hopes for a common Christian witness in Europe. However, the confusion that ensued in the years that followed represented so vast a challenge for the churches that they were now forced to decide for themselves the exact nature of the tasks that were confronting them. Assemblies were held in 1992 by Catholics, Protestants and Orthodox in an attempt to assess the new situation – a Roman Catholic bishops' synod in Prague, a European Protestant assembly in Budapest, and a meeting of Orthodox primates in Istanbul. It took five more years until the agenda for a second European ecumenical assembly, held in Graz, Austria, in 1997, had matured. This event provided new opportunities for collaboration but also made manifest the continuing complexity of relations among churches in Europe.

The Orthodox churches, in particular, faced enormous challenges. After the fall of communism they were given new access to all areas of society: schools, hospitals,

prisons and, not least of all, the media. After so many years on the periphery, the churches had to make considerable adjustment in their lives and administrative structures. A process of renewal had to take place. At the same time tensions that for many years had been suppressed became visible. Conservative voices made themselves heard, questioning the involvement of the Orthodox churches in the ecumenical movement. Western churches and church movements contributed to these internal tensions by their sometimes inconsiderate – even arrogant – attempts to promote spiritual renewal in Eastern Europe, giving rise to charges of proselytizing. John Paul II called for the re-evangelization of Europe – with a special emphasis on Eastern Europe. Numerous Roman Catholic and Protestant groups started missionary activities in Eastern Europe and sects of all sorts began to promote their particular messages. A survey showed that in 1995 in Albania, the one state where atheism had been given the status of a "state religion", around 150 different Western groups were at work. The restoration in Ukraine and Romania of the uniate churches which had been suppressed under the communist regime could not be realized without causing considerable tensions, adding new difficulties to the dialogue between Orthodoxy and the Roman Catholic Church. The political changes and conflicts which followed the implosion of the communist system had far-reaching consequences for the churches. They primarily affected the Patriarchate of Moscow. With the dissolution of the Soviet Union an autonomous Orthodox church came into being in Ukraine, and in 1996 the previously mentioned tensions occurred between the Patriarchates of Moscow and Constantinople over the issue of the jurisdictional status of the Orthodox church in Estonia.

The Western churches, too, had to face the challenge of this new situation. The Western social and economic model appeared to have emerged victorious from the confrontation between the two rival systems. An unrestricted development of the free market seemed to many in the West the only appropriate answer to contemporary needs. Yet growing contradictions were emerging at the same time. Not only was the North-South divide unresolved, but social problems were increasing: new poverty, vast numbers of unemployed people, drug addiction, etc. The development of the market was accompanied by constraints which made society look increasingly inhuman. The more evident this course of events became, the less permissible seemed any attempt to justify it by citing the much greater evil of the centrally controlled communist system which had dominated some nations in the past.

The countries of the third world now faced a single Western system and had to come to terms with it. Not so long ago, the great project of "liberation" had offered a common perspective to broad constituencies in the churches of the third world. This perspective, however, was now fast beginning to seem less attractive and increasingly gave way to either either inward-looking piety or to pragmatic realism. While a number of Asian countries achieved accelerated economic growth, the churches in several African countries were experiencing a rapidly progressive collapse of state and economic structures. In consequence of the fact that the advance towards modernization required an appropriate theological analysis, a "theology of reconstruction" was proposed increasingly as a substitute for the theology of liberation.

One great sign of hope was the overwhelming change that took place in South Africa. The apartheid system came to an end without leading to the blood-bath that had been feared for so many years. Despite its immense economic and political power the system had, in fact, lost its moral legitimacy. In light of the new global situation caused by the demise of communism as a world power, it was also in the interest of the West to seek

and support new solutions in South Africa. Decisive initiatives, however, came from inside. In a relatively short time, through free elections, a government of the black majority came into power. A variety of factors fostered this relatively peaceful transition to a democratic society. The outstanding figure of Nelson Mandela played a major role in this process. The consistent witness of broad church groups was a decisive contribution to the change-over. It is highly significant that Archbishop Desmond Tutu was asked to preside over the Truth and Reconciliation Commission set up to investigate the crimes of the former system. Though the wounds of the past, the legacies of the time of oppression, were not yet healed, a new situation arose through the work of this unique commission. New forces for the construction of a new order have been set free. Yet the magnitude of the tasks still to be faced by the country exceeded all expectations. Social tensions, poverty, ecological destruction, criminality and AIDS weighed heavily on the agenda of the new South Africa.

THE MORE PROFOUND ASPECTS OF THE CRISIS

In the years following the collapse of communism in Europe, people in the churches increasingly began to realize the threats caused by the technological and industrial society to nature both in the immediate and the more distant future. It became clear that the maintenance of the bases of life on this planet had to be one of the central tasks of Christian witness.

That there are limits to human activity in God's creation was not a new insight. At the least it had become an inescapable theme with the epoch-making book by the Club of Rome in 1971, *Limits to Growth*. At the time, however, the debate evoked only a limited response in the churches. In the 1970s, to be sure, detailed studies had been carried out within the WCC – the now commonplace term "sustainability" originated from those studies. The WCC assembly in Nairobi in 1975 went so far as to make the issue central to its programmes. For a long time, however, the notion of the limits to human activity in creation had little effect on the public testimony of the churches.

At the Vancouver assembly in 1983 it was proposed that the churches should join together in a "conciliar process of mutual commitment" for "justice, peace and the integrity of creation". This summons was based on the acknowledgment that the witness of the churches for justice and peace must be accompanied by a new attitude towards the Creator's gifts. But connecting the three aims of the proposal proved extremely difficult. In view of economic exploitation which required redress and justice, and the danger of a nuclear war, attention was focused primarily on the two goals of justice and peace. The churches of the third world suspected that the reference to the ecological responsibility of humanity represented a toning down of the struggle for justice and liberation. The churches of the Western world saw their primary duty in witness for peace. Even at the two major conferences devoted to the conciliar process, at Basel in 1989 and Seoul in 1990, the ecological crisis was not more than a subordinate theme.

For a long time, the conflict between ideological systems had obscured the crisis of technological and industrial society. Both sides shared the same goal of economic growth. Only the collapse of communist rule brought a new situation into existence – the Western concept of the free-market economy was now unopposed and the Eastern states adopted it. The fact that far greater environmental destruction had occurred under the administrative system of the communist governments seemed to support the notion that the Western system could master the ecological crisis.

At the same time, however, a growing number of critical voices were heard. In 1992, only a few years after the fall of communism, the UN Earth Summit on Environment and Development took place in Rio de Janeiro. There an attempt was made to define the concept of sustainability more adequately and also to apply it politically. In a sense, Rio de Janeiro can be seen as a secular version of the ecumenical "conciliar process" for justice, peace and the integrity of creation. Compared with the 1970s and 1980s, the witness of the churches to integrity of creation was now more active and well-defined.

The crisis of technological and industrial society was deepened after the 1980s by an unprecedented leap in technology which opened undreamed of possibilities. The technological advantage of the West undoubtedly contributed to the fall of the communist system but an answer was needed to the question of how to deal with new scientific achievements. The image of society was profoundly altered within a few years; other changes were sure to come, with the further development of computers, the growth of mobility, the new telecommunications facilities, the prospects of bio-technology and so on. New circumstances were arising with effects that were still hidden.

THE CHRISTIAN THIRD MILLENNIUM: A NEW BEGINNING?

The transition into a new millennium did not open up new horizons. The factors which determined history in previous years and decades continued to be operative in the new millennium, challenging the churches with radically new and unresolved questions. How were the churches to arrive at a common witness in this situation of uncertainty and confusion?

On the one hand, inherited divisions still needed to be overcome. In the last three decades of the century, efforts to consolidate a consensus on doctrine steadily continued in multilateral and bilateral discussions. The publication in the early 1980s of the "convergence text", *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, evoked an unexpectedly impressive response from the churches. A wide range of doctrinal agreements were reached in bilateral conversations. Some churches have found it possible explicitly to declare that anathemas, mutually proclaimed in the past, no longer apply to today's partners.

But these results alone will not lead to communion. The events of 1968 to 2000 did not mark steady movement towards ever greater unity. All the ecumenical achievements could not conceal the simultaneous existence of new tendencies to break apart. Christian communion continued to be exposed to many threats.

The major question remained how the churches would deal with the problems confronting them. In order to enter the new millennium credibly and responsibly, developments of the last few decades would have to be faced and dealt with together. What did true community between women and men mean? What would be the attitude of the church of Jesus Christ to the great world religions? What was the position of human beings in God's creation? And, finally, what hope did the gospel allow and enable humanity to hold for the future – or, more concretely, for the first century of the third millennium? The credibility of Christian proclamation would depend largely on the answers to these questions.

The picture emerging in the year 2000 was contradictory. On the one hand, the urgency of a new commitment was recognized on all sides. On the other hand, uncertainty and confusion grew so strong that the churches were inclined to concentrate on themselves alone. Traditional and even traditionalist positions were in the ascendant. The energies required for the building-up of true unity seemed to be diminishing.

In consequence, a new beginning for ecumenical Christianity was far from assured. As the churches enter a new millennium they are confronted with the unresolved issues of the past. The contradictions in the life of the churches are manifest. The reluctance of an increasing number of Christians to face these contradictions was perhaps the greatest danger to which the churches of 2000 were left exposed.

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