



Lukas Vischer: Prophets and Martyrs in the Memory of the Church Introduction

1. Place and Date of Publication

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2. Historical Context

This volume is a Reformed contribution to a common effort of the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches and the Comunità monastica di Bose in Italy (*1965). They urge Christian World Communions and churches to further a mutual recognition of saints and martyrs.

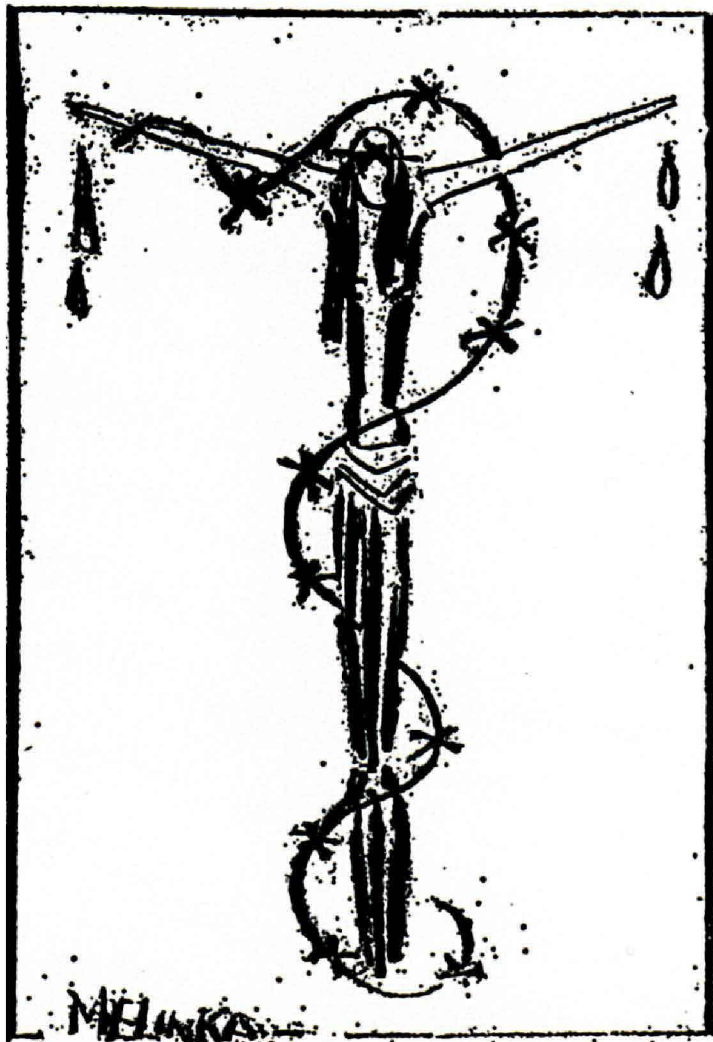
3. Summary

Prophets and martyrs are shining lights in the history of the Church. Their witness remains present and accompanies the Church on its further way as a treasure which provides ever new inspiration. When we celebrate worship on earth, we join their praise in heaven. - Do the separated churches, however, agree about the cloud of witnesses which surrounds and supports us? No; churches obviously differ in their understanding of saints, even if saints are often considered to be “bridge-builders” between confessional boundaries. Their witness has been borne within a particular historical situation and a particular confessional tradition. Many martyrs have died in struggles between churches. Many saints of one church are considered by others as heretics. Moreover, Christian witness leads to identification with the disadvantaged, the poor and the excluded. It has at all times provoked the resistance of the powerful and rich. Numerous Christian martyrdoms have therefore a political and social dimension, often in a nominally Christian context.

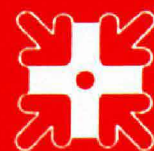
In the New Testament any veneration of martyrs or saints is lacking. The first reference to a person venerated in Christian worship is the account of the martyrdom and veneration of the bones of Polycarp of Smyrna (approximately 156). Later the veneration of saints became an integral part of Christian worship. As dates were fixed for the memory of certain saints, the basis for a calendar of saints was laid. The Second Council of Nicea (787) formulated the distinction between adoration and veneration: While adoration is due to God alone, saints can be the subject of veneration. - In the Orthodox Church the presence of prophets and martyrs becomes visible and tangible through the icons. Belief in the intercession of saints and the exclusive authority of the pope for their canonization mark the Roman Catholic Church. The reformers’ protest was primarily directed against the invocation of saints, as *We are a thousand times better off with Christ* (Luther). - To sum up: There persist fundamental differences in view of the intercession of saints, their invocation for assistance, their role as protectors and patrons, and finally the pope’s claim of infallibility in the canonization.

The effort to recognize the witnesses of the past can never be ultimately concluded. Three considerations are important: 1) Every genuine witness, above all martyrdom, reminds the Church of its true vocation. 2) The last word on the authenticity of the witness of prophets and martyrs lies with God. 3) Remembering the martyrs confronts us with the failures of the Church - a mixture of *error and violence*. History forces upon us an attitude of repentance. Only from there the churches can seek to advance together, and then their past will increasingly appear to be a *common* past.

Commemorating Witnesses and Martyrs of the Past



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– a Reformed Perspective

Edited by Lukas Vischer

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Preface

How do we commemorate the great witnesses of the past? To what extent can their witness become a common treasure of the divided churches?

There are Christians whose witness has transcended all confessional borderlines. But there are also obvious limits to mutual recognition. Every witness is rooted in the life of the Church, and today the churches are divided. Mutual recognition is therefore not a matter of course; even worse, many of the great witnesses cherished by the churches have been victims of Christian persecution. How do we deal with this dark past?

Churches also differ in their approaches to saints and martyrs. In some traditions they have a firm place in liturgy and worship; in others the commemoration of their witness takes other forms.

Inevitably, therefore, the theme of the mutual recognition of saints and martyrs arises in the ecumenical movement. In 1978, the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches drew attention to it, and since then several initiatives were taken to address the issue. Recently, the Faith and Order Commission, in collaboration with the Monastic Community of Bose in Italy, has decided to launch a fresh effort by urging both the Christian World Communions and the individual churches to respond to the challenge.

This volume is meant to be a contribution to this ecumenical exploration. It deals with the theme in the perspective of the Reformed tradition. The Reformed churches are known for their reservations with regard to the veneration of saints. But the witness of martyrs plays a central role in their spiritual heritage. The theme is of essential importance to them.

The volume is in three parts. The first provides a general survey of the theme from a Reformed point of view. The second offers more detailed accounts of four periods of persecution in different parts of the world. The third deals with the difficult question of reconciliation. Though the Reformed were often the victims of persecutions, they have also acted as persecutors. Their dealings with the Mennonite community are a dark chapter of their history. Fortunately, in recent times attempts at reconciliation have brought about a new atmosphere of mutual understanding and even a readiness to engage in common witness.

February 2006

Lukas Vischer

I. Prophets and Martyrs in the Memory of the Church

Lukas Vischer

Introduction

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Introduction

How does the Church keep alive the memory of the witnesses who were of particular importance for its life and witness? How does it make sure that their memory continues to be present in its midst over the generations?

The whole Church has been called to witness to God's great deeds. But from the beginning certain of its members have borne a particularly pure and credible witness. Prophets have succeeded in interpreting the message of Jesus in ways that the churches were able to gather anew around Jesus Christ and to advance with new assurance. Confessors and martyrs have laid down their lives for the cause of the Gospel. The Church has every reason to recall their witness with gratitude. Prophets and martyrs are shining lights in the history of the Church. They have helped the Church to follow the course indicated by Jesus Christ. Their witness is not simply a fact of the past. It remains present and accompanies the Church on its further way as a treasure which provides ever new inspiration.

Not only the apostles but also prophets and martyrs belong to the persons whom the Church must commemorate for the sake of its own authenticity. The apostles are the witnesses who assure the reliability of the proclamation of the Gospel. Called by Jesus and made witnesses of the truth revealed in and through him, they have announced what 'they have seen and heard'. As witnesses of Christ's resurrection they have been able to provide the true interpretation of their experience with Jesus. Subsequent generations were faced with a new task. They had to relate the truth received to new contexts and circumstances. Theologians and preachers were required to act as 'prophets' and open anew the access to the truth. And at all times the Church was in need of persons who sought to follow Christ without restrictions. Confessors and martyrs have rendered this service to the Church. Through their life and, in many cases, death the communion with Christ has become manifest and tangible for the Church.

Prophets and martyrs have completed the course of their life. But they are, with their witness, part of the communion of saints confessed by the Church in its creeds. Those who have completed the course of their life remain

connected with those living today. They surround them as a ‘cloud of witnesses’. They praise God, and when we celebrate worship here on earth, we join their praise in heaven. The formulation of the Te Deum is relevant in this respect:

We praise thee, O God, We acknowledge thee to be the Lord.	Te Deum laudamus, Te Dominum confitemur.
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To thee all angels cry aloud, all heavens and all the powers therein, to thee Cherubim and Seraphim continually cry.	Tibi omnes angeli, tibi caeli et universae potestates Tibi Cherubim et Seraphim incessabili voce proclamant.
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The glorious company of the apostles praise thee, the goodly fellowship of the prophets praise thee, the noble army of martyrs praise thee.	Te gloriosus apostolorum chorus, Te prophetarum laudabilis numerus, Te martyrum candidatus laudat exercitus.
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The holy church throughout all the world acknowledge thee.	Te per orbem terrarum sancta confitetur ecclesia
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Inevitably, however, the question arises whether the separated churches are in a position today to join in this praise together. Are we in agreement about the cloud of witnesses which surrounds and supports us? Or has the division of the churches also led to a deformation of the memory of the prophets and the martyrs of Jesus Christ? The question is unavoidable.

At first sight it seems that the witness of prophets and martyrs transcends confessional boundaries. Today, saints are often considered to be ‘bridge-builders’.¹ Complete identification with Christ, it is said, constitutes a witness which goes beyond narrow confessional confines. Examples can easily be given. Saint Francis of Assisi is accepted, and respected, by Christians of all confessions as a convincing example of Christian life. Or think of martyrs of recent times such as Pawel Alexandrowicz Florenski (Orthodox), Dietrich Bonhoeffer (Protestant), Janani Luwun (Anglican) and Oscar Romero (Roman Catholic). There is no church where their martyrdom is not gratefully recalled. But at closer scrutiny agreement is not as self-evident as it seems.

Two obstacles stand in the way:

1. Churches differ in their understanding of saints. Since the Reformation, at the latest, different approaches have developed with regard to the veneration of saints. The difference also influences the way in which the witness of prophets and martyrs is recalled. How can their witness be commemorated in the church? While the majority of the Christian churches have no hesitation about giving to saints a place in their worship, other churches observe great prudence in this respect. In their eyes no human persons, even if they have lived an extraordinary life, must be allowed to receive any veneration alongside Jesus Christ, the only mediator. The ancient tradition of a calendar of martyrs, specifying days of particular saints, is therefore not shared by all churches. If the memory of martyrs plays any role in these churches, it is not part of worship but rather the subject of biographies, books of meditation or special occasions of commemoration.
2. The second obstacle has even more weight: the mutual recognition of prophets and martyrs. Prophets and martyrs have not lived their lives outside the realities of history; their witness has been borne within a particular confessional tradition. Many saints of one church continue therefore to be considered by other churches as heretics, or will, if no explicit negative judgment is passed, at least not be recognized as prophets and martyrs and therefore not be recalled. This is, in particular, the case for martyrs who have died in struggles between the churches. While in the earliest period of Christian history the persecution originated from enemies of the church, in later times the churches themselves became the initiators of persecution. Deviations from orthodox teaching were suppressed by violence – beginning with the persecution of Donatists to the Waldensians, Hussites, the victims of the Reformation and, today, the many militants losing their lives in the struggle for social justice. When we recall the memory of these martyrs, we are bound to recall also the oppression and violence perpetrated by Christian churches or institutions. Given this fact, a common vision of the ‘cloud of witnesses’ accompanying the Christian Church is far from self-evident.

The conclusion of *Wolfgang Beinert* that “the veneration of saints does in no way constitute a church dividing issue” is therefore no doubt premature.²

It is true that the frontiers between the churches have moved. On the one hand, the forms of the veneration of saints have changed in the Roman Catholic Church, and have lost much of their intensity.³ The practice of the Roman Catholic Church today offers less reason for the classical critique of the Reformers than in previous centuries. On the other hand, numerous Protestant Christians increasingly recognize that the systematic critique of the veneration of Saints in their midst has led to a neglect of the ‘cloud of witnesses’ altogether. According to *Dietrich Ritschl*, “Protestants would be well advised if they could agree to rethink their purism with regard to the saints – the opinion that either all Christians or none are to be considered as saints.”⁴ Similar statements could easily be gathered. It is strange, however, that in all these considerations the difficult issue of mutual recognition is not taken into consideration. The rapprochement in the understanding of the veneration of saints may improve the conditions for an agreement. It can contribute to modifications of spirituality and perhaps lead to liturgical innovation. But it does not address the most difficult question of the common *memoria*. The somewhat rash claim of *Ruth Albrecht* – “that the memory of the life and death of martyrs unites Christians of different confessional traditions because every martyrdom points to Christ” – can certainly not be maintained.⁵

On one occasion the issue of martyrdom also appeared on the agenda of the Faith and Order movement. At the meeting of the Commission in Bangalore (1978) a subgroup dealt with the theme ‘Witness unto Death’.⁶ The report which resulted from this discussion was obviously not more than a first attempt. It contains important observations and theological considerations on the nature of martyrdom in the history of the Church. With much circumspection an effort is made to claim the witness of martyrs for the ecumenical movement. “That is why the martyrs of the early church and some great witnesses of the later history of the church are the common property of all Christians. In the tapestry of Christian history, the ever renewed succession of martyrs is the golden thread.” Immediately the proviso is added that it will require a further step to make this thread visible.

“This also explains why, in some countries, the churches are engaged in the process of mutual recognition of saints, *even if they were killed in the course*

of interconfessional struggles.” The Commission recommended to gather “an ecumenical anthology of past and present martyrdoms” as a means to deepen the communion among the churches.

This recommendation of the Faith and Order Commission was taken seriously by the *Comunità di Bose* in Italy. Referring to the text of Bangalore the community engaged in an effort to establish an ecumenical calendar of martyrs. Based on detailed research and extended consultations with other Christian traditions it published in 2002 a tentative calendar.⁷ In contrast to the ecumenical dialogues, the *comunità* made an attempt to go beyond generalities and to offer a concrete proposal. But in doing so the two obstacles re-appeared with new vigour. Is it really possible to secure common memory by the means of a calendar? And if the answer is affirmative, how can an agreement be reached about who should appear in this calendar? It is the merit of the *comunità di Bose* to have confronted anew the divided churches with these questions.

I. The Significance of Prophets and Martyrs for the Church

1. Witnesses and Martyrs of Jesus Christ – the Biblical Background

Soon after his first appearance in public Jesus surrounds himself with a circle of disciples. Jesus places himself into the hands of human beings. His message will not be announced by angels but by human messengers. The disciples follow him and begin to understand his words. As he sends them out, they make the experience that God identifies with Jesus' message. They abandon him in the moment of suffering but have the privilege of being witnesses of his resurrection. Despite their failure they become servants of his message. The Holy Spirit gives them the strength to witness to him in front of the whole world. An indissoluble communion exists between Jesus and his disciples. Jesus continues to be present and alive in the proclamation of the disciples, and conversely, the preaching of the disciples has power exclusively by the fact that Jesus Christ is its content and that their efforts are confirmed by the Holy Spirit.

This indissoluble communion is mentioned in the New Testament writings in a variety of ways. Jesus sends out and is at the same time present in and through the disciples. He speaks through their mouths and they, conversely, understand themselves as instruments in his hands. This applies not only to the circle of disciples but also to those who follow them, even to all who will become his witnesses. They, God's saints as they are called in the New Testament, are God's messengers in the world. Their own personality has no significance of its own. Their whole task is to allow God's message to pass through them. "For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as the Lord; we ourselves are your servants for Jesus' sake (2 Cor 4,5)."

Jesus' message meets with fierce resistance. He was brought to trial and executed. Whoever proclaims the same message in communion with him, must reckon with the same fate. Suffering, possibly even death, is the inescapable consequence. Jesus is aware of this connection. He foresees the

outcome of his own life in suffering, and leaves also his disciples and other followers in no doubt. “If anybody would come after me, let him deny himself and take up the cross and follow me (Mk 8,34).” The connection was experienced as well by the first Christians. Jesus, the content of their message, was a person executed for the sake of his witness. How could his disciples fare better? “A disciple is not above his master and a servant not above his Lord. It is enough for the disciple to be like his master and for the servant to be like his Lord. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul how much more will they malign those of his household (Matth 10,25).” It is correct to say “that the concept of martyrdom and the idea of martyrs have their origins in Christianity.”⁸ The witness borne by Christ in the world leads to conflict with the world. Whoever joins him in this witness, becomes part of this conflict and must not be surprised when persecution and suffering ensue. They become one with Christ and “complete,” as Paul says, “in their flesh what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the Church (Col 1,24).”

The disciples continue the line which began with the prophets. Like them, they witness to God’s word addressed to the world, and like them they provoke and attract persecution. The Gospel of Matthew places particular emphasis on the prophetic role of the disciples,⁹ and Jesus leaves no doubt about what it means to stand in the succession of the prophets. “Blessed are you if they despise and persecute you ... Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven; for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you (Matth 5,12).” And the Pharisees and Scribes he addresses with the following words: “Therefore I send you prophets and wise men and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify and some you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from town to town that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of innocent Abel to the blood of Zachariah the son of Barachiah whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar (Matth 23,34-35).”

The Greek term *martys* means in the first place witness. Only in the course of time does the term come to mean witness unto death. *Martys* is a person capable of confirming a truth and therefore also in the position to defend this truth. For Luke – both in his Gospel and in Acts – *martyres* are those

who can witness that Jesus has indeed risen from the dead. “You will receive strength when the Holy Spirit come upon you and you will be my witnesses (*martyres*) in Jerusalem and in the whole of Judea and Samaria and until the end of the earth (Acts 1,8).” As eyewitnesses they have the authority to spread the message. The expression did not, however, remain limited to the close circle of the disciples. Luke speaks also of Paul and Stephen as *martyres*. They are not in the first place witnesses because they can confirm what they have seen, but rather because they engage themselves in witnessing to the truth revealed in Christ.

This shift in meaning of the term witness (*martys, martyria, martyrein*) becomes even more evident in John’s writings. Jesus has witnessed to the truth God wishes to reveal to the world (John 18,37), and now, as Christ is no longer in this world, the *martyria* for the truth is provided by the Holy Spirit. The first to witness to him was John the Baptist. He was not himself the light, but gave witness that Christ was the light of the world. He is the truth, and witnessing to the truth is identical to witnessing to him or giving witness about him. The disciples, and with them the whole Christian community, are summoned to witness to him (John 15, 27). The Gospel as a whole can be called *martyria* (John 21, 24). What is at stake is not in the first place to confirm events which have taken place in history, but rather the truth which has been revealed in and to the world.¹⁰

The term *martys* did not therefore from the beginning have the meaning of witness unto death as today’s use would suggest. It simply meant a person witnessing to the truth. But it is not by chance that the expression increasingly acquired the meaning of witness unto death. The close connection which exists between witness to Christ and suffering for the sake of this witness almost inevitably led to this development. In the Book of Revelation Christ is called *the faithful witness* (Rev 1, 5; 3, 14). He who suffered for the sake of his witness, is the archetype of all Christian witness. In the Book of Acts, the death of Stephen is reported in a form making evident the analogy to Christ’s death, and Antipas, one of the early Christian martyrs, is emphatically called a ‘faithful witness’ (2, 13). Christian witness finds its ultimate confirmation through the readiness to give even one’s life for the Gospel.

There is no mention, however, in the New Testament of any veneration of martyrs or saints. There is no interest in prophets or martyrs as persons or personalities and even less of any commemoration of saints in worship. Jesus even firmly criticizes a custom which apparently was widely spread in his days: “Woe to you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, saying if we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets (Matth 23, 29-30).” However, the consciousness that witness in a situation of persecution with all its risks is of the essence of the Christian community was evidently alive. Again and again we find in the New Testament writings exhortations to be prepared for ‘resistance unto death’. The community here on earth knows therefore what it owes to prophets and martyrs. Their witness shapes the life of the Church. The community lives in communion with them. The author of the epistle to the Hebrews recalls the witnesses of Israel. They, he says, surround the community on earth as a ‘great cloud of witnesses’. The community, in turn, looks forward and fixes its eyes on “Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith (12, 2).” This cloud of witnesses will soon be enlarged. The witness borne by Christian prophets and martyrs becomes part of it.

In the Book of Revelation the martyrs appear before the visionary eye of John. They are clothed in white robes, bear palm branches in their hands and praise ‘God and the Lamb’. John is asked: “Who are these, clothed in white and whence have they come? I said to him: Sir, you know. And he said to me: These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb ... they shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; the sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes (7, 9-17).” In this vision, the author of Revelation establishes a relationship between the faithful still living in this world and those who have completed their course and stand already in front of God.

2. The veneration of Saints

The first Christians to be venerated by the Church were the martyrs. They were considered examples and models for the Church on earth. The communion with them opened the door to eternal life. The first reference to a person venerated in Christian worship is the account of the martyrdom of Polycarp of Smyrna (approximately 156). “We have obtained his bones,” writes the community of Smyrna, “they are more precious than exquisite jewels and a greater treasure than gold, we have buried them in an appropriate place. We shall gather there in the grace of God and celebrate the day of his martyrdom.”¹¹ The spontaneous veneration of martyrs soon became general in both East and West. The practice built on and extended the veneration of the apostles who had suffered martyrdom. The place of veneration was the tomb. In the place where the bones of the martyr were buried, the communion with those having accomplished their vocation could be most tangibly experienced. The idea to implore their intercession seemed evident. At the same time the custom to get buried close to the tomb of a saint (*apud sanctos*) gained wider and wider acceptance.

A further step in the development was made when the veneration of saints became an integral part of Christian worship. Certain saints were venerated not only in one place but found acceptance also in other communities. Relics were exchanged, and step by step the idea took root in the church that remains of martyrs should be present in every church. Relics were embedded in the altar. The eucharist was thus symbolically celebrated above the blood of the martyrs. The idea was that the martyr interceded for the community before God. As dates were fixed for the memory of certain saints, the basis for the calendar of saints was laid.

Inevitably, especially after the end of the persecutions by the Roman empire, the question had to be asked whether the crown of life could only be attained by martyrdom. Was it not possible that the witness of Christians whose life was spared was also acceptable to God as a true expression of Christian faith and life? In the course of the fourth century the notion of saints was enlarged. More and more also Christians who had lived a radical and exemplary ascetic life were considered to be saints. In the East Antony, the Hermite (+356),

and Hilarion of Palestine (+371) became at an early date the subject of veneration. Also other great ascetics such as Basil the Great (+379) found acceptance as saints. In one of his sermons Chrysostom (+407) could say: “Mortify your body and crucify it, and you also will obtain the crown of martyrdom.”¹² And Isidor of Sevilla (+636) offered a definition leaving room for a wide spectrum of witnesses: “There are two types of martyrdom, the first consists in visible suffering, the second in the hidden effort to achieve virtue, because many who have suffered the hostility of the enemy and resisted the cupidity of the flesh, have become martyrs even in times of peace by offering themselves in heart and spirit as sacrifice to God, because they would have been martyrs if persecutions would have persisted.” A double development took place. The meaning of the term *martys* was first reduced to designate witness unto death; but after the end of the persecutions it was again extended to mean extraordinary witnesses in general. The suffering of death remained, however, the determining aspect. Another shift took place. To a much larger extent than in the New Testament the emphasis was now placed not on the testimony and its content, but on the virtue of the witness to give up one’s life. Martyrs offer themselves as sacrifice to Christ and are venerated because of their sacrifice. Like Christ himself, their voluntary death enables them to intercede for the Christians still dwelling on earth.

The Church recognized and promoted the veneration of saints. Already in the fourth century the Church rejected theologians and movements which were opposed to the practice.¹³ But the Church at the same time sought to control the cult and keep it within a sound framework of rules. To be venerated, saints needed to be recognized by the Church. The need was felt to distinguish clearly between true and false martyrs. The decision was first the privilege of the local bishops. Soon more detailed regulations by synods became necessary. In the West the decision more and more exclusively fell under the competence of the Pope.¹⁴ The calendar of saints acquired increasing significance. A primary concern was that saints should not be given a role which Christ alone was able to fulfil. The Second Council of Nicea (787) finally formulated the classical distinction between adoration (*latreia, adoratio*) and veneration (*douleia, veneratio*). While adoration was due to God alone, the saints can be the subject of veneration. As servants who have completed their service they point to Jesus Christ.

In subsequent centuries the veneration of saints increasingly became an integral part of Christian spirituality.¹⁵ Churches were named after the names of saints. They were considered patrons of the community. Through the name received at the moment of baptism, individual Christians entered into a special relationship with particular saints. Together with their name day, they also celebrated the memory of the saint. Certain saints became the protectors of certain professions or were invoked for help in various situations of need. Saints became ‘helpers in need’. Places where saints had manifested themselves through miracles became centres of pilgrimages. The distinction made by the Second Council of Nicea could not prevent the veneration of saints from trespassing the official limits and degenerating.

3. Reformation and Catholic Reform

The protest of the reformers against the veneration of saints in their time was primarily directed against the idea that saints could be invoked for intercession with God. Wherever this idea was held, Martin Luther protested in unambiguous terms: “The invocation of saints is also one of the abuses in these last times; it militates against the first fundamental article and destroys the knowledge of Christ; it is nowhere commanded or suggested and there is no hint about it in Holy Scriptures. We are a thousand times better off with Christ.”¹⁶ Luther affirmed, however, the usefulness of commemorating saints. They serve as models and examples. “Besides Holy Scriptures there is no book more useful than the beloved holy legends, especially the accounts of saints who were pure and righteous because they show us in a most agreeable way how they have wholeheartedly believed in and confirmed God’s word.”¹⁷ The *Confessio Augustana* follows exactly the same line: “About the veneration of saints our teaching is that the saints should be commemorated in order to strengthen our faith ... But Holy Scripture provides no proof that we should invoke the saints and ask for their help ... (XXI).”

Calvin rejects the idea of an intercession by the saints even more vigorously. “To dispose God to be gracious, they rely on the merits of the saints and pray to God in their name, and very often leave Christ aside. What else does this mean than transferring his ministry as intercessor to the saints? ... Even

more: What angel or devil has ever revealed a syllable about the invocation of saints as it is practiced today?"¹⁸ Calvin holds the view that not much can be said about the saints and their role before God. According to his opinion it can be assumed that their will is firmly devoted to God's kingdom, but in his eyes it is unlikely that they continue to be concerned with earthly matters.¹⁹ Calvin speaks much less than Luther and the Lutheran tradition of saints as models and examples.

The concentration on Jesus Christ as the unique source of salvation has remained characteristic for the evangelical churches to this day. It found expression in many testimonies of evangelical spirituality, especially in prayers and hymns. It was in particular constitutive for the movements of Puritanism, Pietism and the Revival and continues to shape the life of evangelical Christians. But the strong emphasis on the personal experience of Jesus Christ almost inevitably led to a strong interest in the spiritual ways his witnesses have been guided. If the memory of saints has no place in worship, it played an increasing role in spiritual literature. The history of martyrs by *Jean Crespin* (1520-1572) was widely read in Reformed circles and contributed to keeping alive the idea of martyrdom.²⁰ *Wilhelm Löhe* (1808-1872) points to the deficiency in the life of Lutheran churches: "that we do not have any biographies or accounts of martyrdom, no inspiring stories except perhaps the life of the hero Luther ... but why, if we have once sensed the beauty of the eleventh chapter to the Hebrews or the 44th to 51st chapters of Sirach, should we not also make use of the cloud of witnesses of the New Testament in order to be led to Jesus Christ, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith?"²¹ On the basis of such considerations it was also possible again to develop evangelical calendars attributing extraordinary witnesses of the past to certain days of the year.

Both the protest of the Reformation and the recognition that the praxis of the veneration of saints was indeed in need of reform led the Roman Catholic Church to corrections. The reform found expression in the decree *Decretum de in vocatione, veneratione et reliquiis Sanctorum et sacris imaginibus* promulgated by the Council of Trent on December 3, 1563. The text confirms in principle the veneration of saints. It is 'good and useful' to invoke the saints and to ask for their assistance in order to obtain gifts and benefits

from God through the Son who is the only redeemer and saviour. To justify the veneration of relics the argument is put forward that the bodies of the saints were living members of Christ and part of the temple of the Holy Spirit and they will finally be raised to eternal life. The images of saints have meaning in that they point to the archetypes. At the same time the decree reminds the bishops of their duty to resist wild growth and abuses.

In the West, from the middle ages, as we have seen, the responsibility for ordering the veneration of saints was within the competence of the apostolic see. The pope had to decide on the acceptability of saints. The process of canonisation was governed by rules. In the first place the life of the saint was examined. Was it really saintly beyond doubts? But an important criterion was also whether the veneration of a saint had been confirmed by credible miracles. The medieval tradition was further developed by the Catholic reform of the 16th century. The role of the Holy See in ordering the liturgical life of the Church was strengthened by the Council of Trent. The veneration of saints was from now on the exclusive competence of the Holy See. The process of canonisation was further developed.²² A close relationship was established between the authority of the Pope and the status of a saint in the Church. The papal judgment was considered to be ultimate. The confidence in the intercession of saints canonised by the Pope was increased.

The Second Vatican Council led to further developments. The theme was no longer dealt with under the title *de cultu sanctorum* but in the context of the Constitution on the Church. The Church on its earthly pilgrimage and the heavenly communion of the saints are bound together by close bonds. The saints fulfil a service for the Church on earth. "For after they have been received into their heavenly home and are present to the Lord, through him and with him and in him, they do not cease to intercede with the Father for us. Rather, they show forth the merits which they won on earth ... thus by their brotherly interest our weakness is very greatly strengthened."²³ The Council thus confirmed traditional teaching but placed it in a new context. The governing perspective is now the encompassing communion of the faithful both on earth and in heaven. The Council insists on the need to place particular emphasis on Christ's unique mediatorship in the liturgical life of the Church. Therefore, the great feasts of the church year should receive

clearer visibility over against the feasts of saints. The dignity of the local church should find expression through an increased respect for local traditions of venerating saints. The consciousness of the catholicity of the Church should be promoted by enlarging the list of saints by witnesses of all times and even more of all geographical regions of the world. To a certain extent the calendar published in 1969 does justice to these requests. Disputes arose at that time over the fact that certain saints of legendary character were removed from the calendar. The foundations remained, however, unchanged. Both the intercession of saints and the exclusive authority of the pope for the process of canonisation continue to be characteristics of Roman Catholic teaching and praxis.

During the pontificate of John Paul II the number of canonisations considerably increased.²⁴ In accordance with the requests of the Second Vatican Council, one of the guiding principles was the extension of the 'cloud of witnesses' to all continents. Many canonisations occurred in the context of papal visits. An ecumenical debate about the foundations of the veneration and the canonisation of saints did not take place.

The Orthodox Church of the East has essentially maintained the tradition of the early church. Saints are of great importance for the spirituality of the Orthodox Church. Though it recognizes the distinction of the Second Council of Nicea between adoration and veneration of saints, saints have a central place in the liturgy. Everything is based on the conviction that the faithful of all times form one communion. The liturgy is so ordered that the community on earth approaches God together with the prophets and martyrs. Their presence becomes visible and tangible through the icons. The iconostasis makes their memory alive in the gathered community. In contrast to the Latin Church, the responsibility for the recognition of saints is within the competence of the autocephalous churches. Some Orthodox churches, e.g., the Russian-Orthodox and the Georgian-Orthodox Churches, have elevated in recent years several contemporary witnesses to the rank of saints.²⁵

4. Conclusion

The dialogue among the churches about the veneration of saints can today take place on new grounds. There is agreement that the significance of saints lies in the witness which they delivered. What characterizes martyrs, is their communion with Christ even in facing the ultimate test. What distinguishes them from ordinary Christians, is not a life without sin. Like all members of the Christian community they are in need of forgiveness and can approach the heavenly throne only on the basis of God's grace revealed in Christ. There are good reasons for Paul to speak of *all* Christians as 'saints' – holiness is a gift to be humbly received. Even saints are in no other sense holy than are all members of the body of Christ. What distinguishes them, is the clarity of their witness to Christ.

There is also agreement that the cloud of the witnesses who have given expression to their faith with particular clarity accompanies and surrounds us today. To commemorate prophets and martyrs is part of the life of the Church and is being recognized more and more by all churches as an integral element of Christian spirituality. The commemoration is the expression of the communion which exists between the earthly and the heavenly Church.

Two 'atmospheric' shifts are contributing to the rapprochement. On the Roman Catholic side the significance of the veneration of saints has considerably diminished. *De facto* the Protestant accusation that the veneration of saints supersedes the unique mediatorship of Jesus Christ has lost much its *raison-d'être*. Conversely, Protestant churches recognize increasingly that the radical rejection of the veneration of saints has led to distortions in their own midst. The legitimate condemnation of abuses has undermined the consciousness of the communion with the witnesses of the past. New departures are taking place especially in the Anglican and Lutheran but also in other Protestant traditions. Calendars with the names of important spiritual persons have also gained a certain place of worth in the churches of the Reformation.

Fundamental differences persist, however. The churches continue to differ about prayers offered to saints. Are the saints actively interceding for us?

Or are they rather to be seen as, so to say, the choir of witnesses which the Christians here on earth join with their praise of the triune God? Is it possible to ask saints for their assistance? Or do we commemorate them in order to strengthen our faith and to enlarge the horizons of our spirituality? Can certain saints be considered as protectors and patrons? Or does this view confuse saints with angels? All these questions have consequences for the spirituality of the separated churches. But they are perhaps not of so much weight that the differing answers could not find their place within one and the same church.

II. Who is Part of the Cloud of Witnesses?

Of much more weight is the second issue: Who belongs to the cloud of witnesses? All churches are no doubt in agreement that the answer to this question lies ultimately with God alone. Any recognition issued by a church can at best have no more than a preliminary character. In order to commemorate prophets and martyrs, inescapably a decision must be made. Each church has its own way of dealing with this necessity. The problem becomes even more complicated when Christians of separated churches refer to the cloud of witnesses. How do the 'different clouds' relate to one another? To answer this question, common decisions are required. But today we are still far away from an agreement on the mutual recognition of saints.

1. Martyrs and the division of the Church

In the course of the centuries, the struggles and conflicts between the churches have caused innumerable victims. Movements deviating from the teaching, the spirituality or the order of the official church were not only condemned and rejected but often, when the opportunity was open to the churches, also persecuted and suppressed. The history of Christian martyrdom is not only the history of witnesses who were hated and persecuted by the 'world' for the sake of their faith in Jesus Christ. An internal trace of blood runs through the history of the Church : Christians persecuted and killed by Christians, as a rule members of minorities which did not succeed in obtaining recognition by the majority church, often also victims of struggles between churches of different confessional background. Many of these witnesses are recognized by individual churches as martyrs and are alive in their memory as witnesses of the truth.

In the first place the churches must live up to the question of how they are prepared to cope with the violence perpetrated by themselves. More and more the insight is accepted by all churches that using violence for the solution of conflicts clearly contradicts the very essence of the Gospel, and represents therefore a counter-witness. More and more the churches recognize their failure in this respect in the course of history. The victims in whose killing they have participated bring to their consciousness the degree of

violence contained in their proclamation. The encounter with other churches in the ecumenical movement has led certain churches to ask for forgiveness for their misdeeds. The recognition of our own guilt can no doubt lay the ground for a new relationship among the churches. But does this mean that the martyrs of other churches can also be recognized as true witnesses of Christ by our own church?

The problem is obvious. Can a martyr of a church, which according to the judgment of our own church is in error, be considered as a true witness of Christ? Everybody will agree to respect the faithfulness of martyrs of other churches to their cause. But is it possible to understand their martyrdom as witness to Jesus Christ if their cause did not clearly correspond to the Gospel of Christ but represented an erroneous teaching? All churches will hesitate to place martyrs of other churches at the same level as the saints venerated and respected in their own midst.

The conflicts between the churches have often led to explicit condemnations. The ecumenical dialogue has shown that many of these *anathemas* have lost their meaning because they no longer apply to the partners of today. Judgments which seemed unavoidable in a certain historical context need no longer be maintained under the changed circumstances of present times. This does not mean that these condemnations had no reason at the time they were formulated, but simply that they have lost their relevance today and therefore need not prevent communion between the churches. But how are we to deal with the conflicts which led to the condemnations? If we are able to recognize together the communion which exists now between churches divided in the past, can we automatically also recognize the martyrs of the past as martyrs of the Gospel? Or do they continue to be identified with the error in the past?

Is thus the mutual recognition of saints ultimately an impossible suggestion? Or are there ways leading out of this dilemma?

2. The early centuries of the Church

Internal conflicts began with the existence of the Church, and soon the issue of the recognition of martyrs arose. In the earliest period the question was whether adherents of a movement deviating from the teaching of the Church could ever become true martyrs. In the second century, both among the disciples of Marcion and in the Montanist movement, martyrs enjoyed highest respect. Through their radical witness both movements represented a challenge to the order of society. A relatively high number of martyrs came from their ranks. But could they be considered as true martyrs? The question could not easily be answered. On the one hand it was clear that their courage and readiness to pay the price of their faith were to be highly valued, on the other hand the close connection between the Gospel and the witness of the martyr needed to be maintained. “Faith is not validated by persons, but on the contrary persons by their true faith,” declared Tertullian.²⁶ Authoritative sentences were formulated by Cyprian (+258). According to him, heretics are not true martyrs because the decisive reality is not the name of Christ but Christ himself whom heretics deny; and even adherents of schismatic groups not rejecting the teaching of the Church cannot be considered as true martyrs. “Because who does not belong to the Church cannot be a martyr.” He lacks love and according to Paul nothing is of any use without love “even if I offer my body to be burnt” (I Cor 13.3). Martyrdom which is not rooted in the communion of the Church must therefore be rejected.²⁷ This negative approach could also easily lead to attempts at denigrating the moral motivation of dissident martyrs.

A new constellation arose with the end of the persecutions. The Church now faced a Christian emperor. He was its protector – but also sought to use it for his own purposes. Minorities deviating from the official church represented at the same time a threat to the unity of the empire. More and more frequently Christians could become victims of the official – Christian – line of the empire. On the one hand the Church could celebrate its victory over the pagan empire, on the other hand it was increasingly involved in inner-Christian conflicts and persecutions.

During the christological struggles Christian emperors time and again took harsh measures against dissidents. “Who dares to say,” Athanasius declares,

“that Christians today enjoy a period of peace rather than a time of persecution as it occurred never before and never will before the coming of the Antichrist.”²⁸ The frontiers were no longer as clear as in the past. Christianity had entered a state of ‘civil war’.²⁹ How should we think of its victims? Some of the protagonists in these debates such as Athanasius and Basilius, have become recognized saints; others who have suffered have been forgotten or were even condemned after the victory of orthodoxy.³⁰

The Donatist schism in North Africa makes the shift in the constellation even more obvious. The Donatists were determined to remain faithful to the tradition of the persecuted church of the first centuries. In their eyes priests who had yielded to the pressure of the persecutors were not worthy to act any longer as priests. The consecration of Cecilian, elected after the persecution as bishop of Carthage, met therefore with resistance. By electing a counter-bishop, first Majorinus (+ ca.311) and then Donatus (+355), the rigorists sought to constitute themselves as the true Church. Emperor Constantine made an attempt to prevent a schism by convoking a council in Arles (314). The Donatists were condemned, but in no way retreated. The movement lasted well into the fifth century when it was finally suppressed, partly by the use of harsh violence.

The Donatists were a persecuted minority. Precisely for this reason they considered themselves as the true disciples of Christ and the genuine successors of the early Church. In their eyes the official Church had abandoned the truth. “In our view,” the Donatists declared, “the Church which suffers persecution must be considered as the truly catholic Church, not the one which is responsible for persecutions.”³¹ The catholic majority, they said, are the descendants of those who have denied Christ and it is therefore understandable that they are the cause of new martyrs. It is difficult to get a clear picture of Donatist spirituality. Their convictions have often been reported by the representatives of the catholic majority in distorted ways. They were in any case a rigorist movement prone to excesses and especially in the later period to terrorist violence. There can be no doubt, however, that numerous Donatists suffered martyrdom on the ground of deep Christian convictions.

The representatives of the majority sought to prove that the witness of Donatists was in reality no martyrdom. Optatus of Mileve (+ before 400) emphatically claims that Donatists suffered for crimes which they had committed and that it was therefore inappropriate to speak of a persecution for the sake of religious convictions. The decisive presupposition of martyrdom is the confession of faith, he insists. This argument was further developed by Augustin (354-430). "All pagans and criminals endure their suffering because of untruth. Therefore nobody may point to or boast of his suffering, but he better prove the truth of his discourse. You point to the punishment, I am concerned with the cause. Because if we consider only the suffering, even robbers could attain the crown and the devil could declare himself a martyr because today his temples and priests are perishing."³² Nevertheless it was not possible to accuse the Donatists of not accepting the teaching of the Church. They affirmed the Christian faith and deviated from the officially recognized Church only in their understanding of discipleship. But precisely this difference now becomes a sufficient reason for persecutions. Augustin finally went as far as approving measures by the state authorities. "Coercion exercised by the state in the service of the Church is in reality a coercion of love, because it does not destroy the apostates as they will finally admit themselves, but saves them by bringing them back to the catholic communion."³³ The argument formulated by Augustin has often been re-used in subsequent centuries and provided legitimacy for a model of persecution which has caused innumerable victims. All elements are already present. The struggle of the majority Church against radical minorities. The close connection of the majority church with state power. The rejection of the possibility of any martyrdom outside the official Church.

3. The Example of the Reformed Tradition

The Donatist martyrs were commemorated as long as the Donatist schism existed. They were forgotten after the suppression of the movement. The situation is different for minorities which succeeded in surviving over the centuries. Their martyrs continue to be present in their memory until today.

The Reformed churches may serve as an illustration. As do several other traditions resulting from reform movements, they look back on a long chain of persecutions. Their history from century to century is characterized by

many martyrdoms. For almost all of them the responsibility lies with 'Christian' powers. Only after the French revolution did the constellation change. As in many other churches, numerous Reformed Christians have lost their lives in the course of the missionary movement of the 19th and 20th centuries. At the same time it must not be overlooked that Reformed churches have also been the cause of persecutions. For centuries they have contributed to the suppression of Anabaptists and other dissidents.

a) Waldensians

Their movement has its origins in the 12th century but they decided in 1532 to join the Reformation and belong today to the family of Reformed churches. The primary goal of the founder of the movement Valdes, a merchant from Lyon, was to renew the preaching of the Gospel in its original radical form. Christians should communicate the good news in poverty. "Naked they follow the naked Christ," an early witness reports.³⁴ Lay people, both men and women, were called to this ministry. What the mendicant orders later achieved, the Waldensian movement did not succeed in achieving. It was not recognized by the Church but declared heretical by a synod in Verona in 1184. Despite this it spread further. It found an echo not only in France and the Northern Italy but increasingly also in the North of Europe as far as Bohemia and Poland. The Waldensians represented in the centuries before the Reformation a European movement.³⁵

The beginning of the movement coincided with the movement of the Cathars. Though the Waldensians in principle affirmed the official teaching of the Church, they were often suspected of the heresy of the Cathars. In any case they became victims of the inquisition in subsequent centuries. In many places they were brought to trial and, if they were not prepared to give up their convictions, sentenced to death. Since only a very few Waldensian writings have been preserved, our main information on the martyrs of the Waldensian movement is to be found in the minutes of court cases, a source which is, of course, highly biased. Often individuals, but as a rule whole groups of Waldensians, were brought to trial and sentenced. The precise figure of Waldensian martyrs from the 12th to the first half of the 15th century is impossible to establish.³⁶

In the 16th century the Waldensians in the Alpine valleys of the Piemontese-French border joined the Reformation. They established a close relationship with the Reformer Guillaume Farel. After protracted negotiations they reached an agreement at the synod of Chanforan in 1532. In the years preceding this decision a series of executions had taken place – in 1525 Peter Sébiville from Grenoble was burnt and in 1536 Martin Gonin who had been active in promoting the rapprochement with the Reformation movement was drowned in the river Isère. Under François I the Waldensians in the Provence were systematically persecuted.

The Waldensians did not survive as a European movement. They became the ‘territorial church’ of the Alpine valley of the Piemont. But they remained a persecuted minority. Again and again they went through hard times of oppression. For centuries they had to face an enemy whose declared intention was to exterminate the heresy. The ravages of the ‘Bloody Spring’, the invasion of the valley by the Piemontese troops, were particularly devastating. The Waldensians began now to fight for their survival more and more by military means. They were no longer primarily a movement which sought to renew Christ’s mission for their own time but rather an heroic minority which sought to defend itself – often inspired by examples of the Old Testament – against the superior force of the alliance between the king of Savoy and the Roman Church.³⁷

b) Hussites

The history of Hussites is an integral part of the history of Bohemia. The great figures of the Hussite movement are at the same time also Czech national figures. But the movement holds today also a privileged place in the tradition of the Reformed churches. Their history through the centuries has become an essential element of the Reformed tradition. In many Reformed churches their witness is gratefully recalled.

Jan Hus called for a far-reaching reform of the Church. Its life was to be shaped by the spirit of Holy Scriptures. He sharply criticized the clergy of his time and advocated apostolic poverty. His preaching soon led to conflicts with the official church. The first three martyrs of the movement were

executed on July 11, 1412. Jan Hus himself was sentenced to death on the stake by the Council of Constance in 1415. Numerous followers suffered the same fate – Hieronymus of Prague (1416), Nicolas of Dresden (1417), Gilles Mersault (1423), Johann Drändorf (1425), Peter Turnow (1425) and many others. The death of Jan Hus provoked in Bohemia a popular protest movement. It resulted in armed resistance. A crusade which was organised to restore order in Bohemia failed. For a moment it looked as if the Hussite movement would be able to maintain itself. The Council of Basel in 1433 was prepared to make a number of concessions. But the situation was soon reversed. The Hussites were again persecuted and oppressed as heretics. Many of its adherents fell victim to the inquisition.³⁸

c) Prophets and martyrs of the Reformation

The insights of the Reformers remain foundational for the churches of the Reformation until today. The reformers are therefore alive in their memory. It would be an illusion to look at the message of the reformers exclusively from the perspective of ‘doctrine’. The mutual recognition of the churches also needs to include the persons who were the bearers of the message. For the churches of the Reformation, the reformers and numerous other spiritual persons of later generations belong to the ‘prophets’ of the Church.

In many countries of Europe the Reformation has caused persecutions and martyrdoms. The message of the Reformation shook the foundations of the existing order of society. The response to the provocation were repressive measures both by the Church and the state authorities. The instruments which had been used by Church and state in the middle ages to repress heretic movements, were now engaged against the Reformation movement. Among the first martyrs of the Reformation were Hendrik Voes and John of Essen; they were burnt in 1523 in Brussels because they had spread Luther’s writings and ideas. They were followed in the Netherlands in 1525 by Willem Dircksz and John Pistorius. In 1557 Angelus Merula, pastor in Heenvliet since 1532, founder of an orphanage, was executed. In 1524 Kaspar Tauber, a respected citizen of Vienna, lost his life for his convictions, and three years later Linhard Kheyser was put to death in Passau.³⁹ Several executions also occurred in Hungary.⁴⁰ In Italy and Spain many monks and

priests who shared the views of the reformers became victims of the inquisition.

Numerous executions occurred in the early period of the Reformation especially in France: Jean Vallière (1523), Jean Leclerc (1525), Jacques Pouent (1525) and Louis de Berquin (1529). Under François I, after 1534, many evangelical Christians died in France, among them also women like Marie la Catelle, and after 1547 under Henry II arrests and death sentences increased. Considerable emotion was caused by the public burning of Pierre Leclerc and Etienne Mangin together with fourteen members of the congregation of Meaux (1546). The death of five students of theology, executed in 1555 in Lyon shows how great a risk it was to spread the message of the Reformation in France.⁴¹

A distinction must be made between the first decades of the Reformation movement and later developments starting with approximately the middle of the century. While in the beginning the use of violence was the characteristic of the 'old faith', in later times evangelical Christians opted more and more for open resistance. As already in the case of the Hussite movement, what started as a movement of faith ended up in armed conflict. Great minds like John Calvin foresaw the dangers connected with this development. He wrote in 1561 to admiral Gaspard de Coligny, "If only one drop of blood would be shed by our side, streams of blood will cover the whole of Europe."⁴² But the disaster of military action could not be prevented. The Netherlands, France, but also Austria, became the theatre of confessional wars. As before, many evangelical Christians became victims of repressive measures and brutal violence. Examples are the liberation wars in the Netherlands, the night of Bartholomew in France (1572), celebrated by Pope Pius V by a *Te Deum*, the massacre of Valtellina (1621) or also the ruthless suppression of the second peasants rebellion in Austria (1625-1627). The cruelty of these events went beyond all proportions and rightly provoked indignation among evangelical Christians. But can the victims of these confessional conflicts really be considered as martyrs? Many among them died no doubt because of their faith in Christ. The assessment of their death is made difficult, however, by the fact that the witness of the churches now took place in the context of mutual violence. Particular respect is due to

Christians who in this period sought to overcome the conflicts of their time through their witness and perhaps also their death.

d) The Established Church in England

The reaction under Mary the Catholic in England (1553-1558) was a time of bloody terror. Around 300 evangelical Christians were executed during the time of her reign, among them also the Archbishop of Canterbury Thomas Cranmer, who had participated in the redaction of the *Book of Common Prayer*. Reformed movements such as Presbyterianism, Puritanism and Congregationalism had a hard time under the English monarchy. They struggled for a form of the Church corresponding to the will of Scripture. On the ground of this conviction they rejected the episcopal system of the Church of England. Particularly the election and installation of bishops through the state were unacceptable in their eyes. Under Elizabeth I (1558-1603) the contrast turned into open conflict. Among the martyrs of the congregationalist cause the following names deserve to be mentioned: Henry Barrow and John Penry; they were hanged in 1593. The struggles of subsequent centuries claimed many victims. The example of their resistance is to this day an important dimension of the spirituality of the Free churches in England and also the United States.

e) The era of absolutism

Under the absolutistic regimes in Hungary and France Reformed churches were exposed to harsh persecutions. In Hungary the Counter-Reformation began in the first half of the 17th century. Peter Pázmány, archbishop of Ezer (1570-1637), pursued a systematic programme to restore the unity of the Church. Due to the military successes of Stephen Bocskay (1557-1606), Gabriel Bethlen (1580-1629) and George Rakoczi I (1593-1648), it could not be fully achieved. Under Leopold I (1657-1705) the Counter-Reformation was realized by ruthless political and violent means. George Szelepcsény, archbishop of Pressburg, was the driving force of the campaign. Special tribunals under his presidency (1672, 1673 and especially 1674) issued heavy sentences against pastors who were not willing to abjure to their faith. Especially the 42 pastors who were condemned to serve as galley

slaves and sold to Naples have remained alive in the memory of later generations. In 1688 twenty respected Protestants were found guilty by the 'Bloody Tribunal' of Eperies and cruelly put to death.⁴³ Looking back on the year 1674 the yearbook of the Jesuit province of Austria declares: "This year has left to posterity a shining example how much the armed power of the state, combined with the preaching of the truth, can achieve for the just cause of conquering souls."

By far harsher were the persecutions of the Reformed in France. By the edict of Nantes issued in 1598, Henry IV had granted toleration to the Protestants of France. The Church could establish itself. The Protestants formed in a certain sense a state within the state. But in the course of the 16th century the power and the influence of the Protestants was gradually diminished. More and more repressive measures were taken. The actual persecution started with the revocation of the edict of Nantes by Louis XIV in 1685. The vision behind this decision was that the unity of the state also demanded the unity of the religion – *une loi, un roi, une foi dans le royaume*. Tens of thousands left the country as refugees. Those staying behind had to reckon with imprisonment, service on the galleys or even execution.⁴⁴ Among the first martyrs the name of Claude Brousson (+1698) stands out. Only a short time after his execution 12 Reformed Christians were killed on the wheel and 31 hanged; numerous other condemnations and executions followed.⁴⁵

Once more the same process repeated itself. Under the intolerable pressure of the persecution the Reformed in Cevennes, led by Jean Cavalier, took up arms and for several years offered fierce resistance to the oppression (1702-1704).⁴⁶

The persecution lasted into the 18th century. That the Reformed did not disappear is to a large extent due to Antoine Court (1696-1760). He gathered the first synod of the 'église du désert' in 1715 in a remote quarry near Montoblet. Five of the six participants died in the following years as martyrs. Antoine Court led a theological seminary in Lausanne for candidates who were prepared to return to France and to serve there as pastors. Many of them were arrested and executed, among them, for instance, Alexandre

Roussel. A particularly outstanding example of resistance was given by the family Durand: the father was condemned to long years of imprisonment; the son, pastor Pierre Durand, was hanged in Montpellier; and Mary Durand was kept, together with a group of other women, for a long period in the 'Tour de Constance' at Aigues-Mortes and released only in 1768. Hundreds, thousands became victims of the persecution in the course of the 18th century. In the period from 1744 to 1752 alone, more than 600 Protestants were condemned to serve on the galleys.⁴⁷

f) Reformed Churches as Persecutors

But Reformed churches were not only victims of Christian intolerance. Where they were in the majority and the arm of state power was at their disposal, they also persecuted and violently oppressed dissident movements. The hostility primarily concerned the Roman Catholic Church. In many places Roman Catholic Christians had to endure harsh measures from Reformed authorities.

In particular, Reformed churches have been guilty of cruel persecutions of Anabaptists and Mennonites. In their self-understanding the Anabaptist movement was part of the Reformation. It was committed to a radical reform of the Church. Anxious to form communities according to the model of Holy Scriptures, they rejected infant baptism. The Church was to consist of members who consciously confessed Jesus Christ. In the judgment of that time this step called into question the foundations of Christian society. Zürich was the place of the first conflict. Disputations did not bring any solution. The first Anabaptist martyr Felix Manz was drowned in the river Limmat in 1527. Wherever the Anabaptist movement spread, it became the object of persecutions both from Reformed and Lutheran as well as from Roman Catholic side. For the period up to 1539 the names of approximately 780 Anabaptist martyrs are known for the region of South Germany alone.

The sufferings of the Mennonites lasted until the end of the 18th century. Again and again they became victims of vexations. They settled where they were granted tolerance, but when conditions changed, they were again driven away. By following their fate through the centuries, the history of tolerance

and intolerance in Europe could be written. The persecution was particularly systematic in Switzerland. The last Mennonite martyr in Berne was Hans Haslibacher (1571) and in Zürich Hans Landis (1614). Measures of oppression continued, however. The cities of Berne and Zürich sought to get rid of them by banishment. Thousands were forced to emigrate. In 1571, for instance, a group of 700 Mennonites from Berne and Zürich were sent into exile. Numerous Mennonites found later refuge in the United States. In Switzerland toleration was officially granted only in 1799 in the period of the Helvetic Republic. In Berne they obtained equal rights only in 1815.⁴⁸

A second front which led to the use of violent means by the Reformers was the anti-trinitarian movement. The death sentence against Michael Servet (1511-1553) in Geneva shows the extent to which also Reformed cities were prone to protect the fundamental truths of the Christian faith by law and sanctions.⁴⁹

g) Martyrs of Christian Mission in the 19th and 20th centuries

With the enlightenment and the French revolution the inner-Christian persecutions came to an end. The impasse of the inter-confessional struggles became more and more obvious, and the idea of tolerance consequently gained ground. In the course especially of the 18th century, measures against religious minorities met increasingly with criticism. In contrast to previous centuries the attitude of Zürich and Berne regarding the Mennonites was no longer understood. Several governments intervened in their favour. In the 'new world' of America the idea of tolerance had found acceptance already at an earlier date. The movement culminated in the Bills of Rights (1776 ss) which declared religious liberty an inalienable right. In Austria the 'Toleranzpatent' of Joseph II (1781) opened a new era and with the declaration of human and civil rights of the French revolution new principles were formulated for the ordering of society. Though acts of religious discrimination continued to be committed, the era of violent inner-Christian oppression had passed.

In the missionary movement starting in the 18th and 19th century martyrdom gained new relevance. As the Protestant churches faced up to the challenge

of proclaiming the Gospel to the 'ends of the earth', a new situation arose. Missionary witness could meet with violent resistance. As in the early history of the Church, the Gospel was considered to be a threat to the inherited tradition and order of society. Many missionaries have paid for their commitment the price of their lives. In many cases, the victims of martyrdom were not the missionaries sent from abroad but the first Christians in the new country. The anger about the attacks directed against traditional beliefs and customs was discharged against them.

A few examples:

- i) *Madagascar*. The Reformed tradition was brought to the country by the congregationalist London Missionary Society. In 1818 two English missionaries, David Jones and Trevor Bevan, arrived in Taomasina in the East of the island. Protected by King Radama (1810-1828) they successfully established several schools. The missionaries started the translation of the Bible and introduced for this purpose the Latin alphabet. But under Queen Ranavalona I (1828-1861), the successor of Radama I, the wind changed. The missionaries were expelled in 1835 – the same year in which the Bible translation was published. The persecution occurred in several waves: 1836-1839, 1849 and 1857. Cruel methods were used. Rasalama, a woman, and Rafaralahy Andriamatoto were stabbed with spears (1836 and 1838). Ten years later a group of 14 Christians was thrown from a rock. In the same year nine Christians were beheaded, four burnt alive. In 1857 Ratsimahavandy was stoned together with ten other Christians.⁵⁰
- ii) *Korea*. In the history of Korean churches three periods of martyrdom can be distinguished. The Catholic Church took roots in Korea in the 18th century. The adherents of the Christian faith were harshly oppressed. Several thousand Christians died in the persecutions. Protestant missions followed in 1880s. During the last years of Japanese occupation of the peninsula (1910-1945) the young church had to pass a very serious test. As a sign of loyalty to the Japanese, the colonial authorities forced upon the Koreans the public veneration of the Shinto-shrine. Christians who refused to yield had to reckon with severe punishment. Many were

arrested, imprisoned, some were executed. A particularly uncompromising witness was Joo Ki-Chul (1897-1944). A third wave of persecutions followed in the 1950s and '60s under the communist regime in North Korea. Among the martyrs of this period the names of Kim Ik-Du (1874-1950), Yang Choo-Sam (1879-1950), Son Yang-Won (1902-1950) can be mentioned.⁵¹

iii) Sudan. During the protracted violent struggles between North and South in the Sudan numerous Christians became martyrs. Besides the Roman Catholic and the Anglican churches Protestant missions were also active in the Sudan. Through their witness several churches have come into being. They were often suspected by the Northern army of collaborating with the Southern rebels. For this reason, many Christians were arrested and executed. The witness of Gideon Adwok (*1924), William Olyew and Simon Anyang has remained alive in the memory of the Church. They were arrested in 1964 and shot shortly after. They were members of the Sudan Interior Church. The missionaries working with this church had been expelled in February 1964. Gideon Adwok, ordained only one year before, was given a leading role in the Sudan Interior Church. The government in Khartoum was at that time determined to islamise the South. Sudanese Christians were therefore in a precarious situation. Pressure was put on Gideon Adwok and his two companions to give away the names of the members of the Christian community. As they refused, they were killed. Today one of the Theological Schools in Khartoum bears the name of Gideon Adwok.

h) Victims of Radical Atheism

A new kind of persecution of the Christian Church started with the October Revolution in Russia in 1917. Religion was seen by the protagonists of the Revolution as a backward force standing in the way and hindering the development of society towards true socialism and therefore to be eliminated. All religions, but especially the churches, were systematically marginalised and in many cases actively persecuted in the Soviet Union and after the Second World War also in other socialist countries. The expectation was that religion would gradually dissolve by itself with the progress of socialism.

Or also the reverse: that campaigns against religion and spiritual life would favour the progress towards the final goal of socialism. Measures affected in the first place the Orthodox Church in Russia and in other countries of Eastern Europe. But also Reformed churches have suffered in the struggle with this form of radical secularism.

The Second World War resulted in far-reaching geopolitical changes. Through the division of Europe new areas came into the orbit of the Soviet power. As a consequence the same policies regarding religion were applied. Wherever communist regimes were established, the churches suffered measures of marginalisation. The Hungarian speaking Reformed churches, especially the Reformed Church in the Ukraine, may serve as illustration. After World War II the Karpato-Ukraine became Soviet territory. When the Soviet troops occupied the country in 1944, a sizable part of the male population was deported for a shorter or longer time. Many died at that time. Before the war, a revival named *Soli Deo Gloria* had taken place in the small Reformed Church. The pastors remained faithful to their convictions also under the new circumstances and continued to engage in public witness. Two pastors - Jozsef Zimányi and Barna Harkay – addressed in a letter a warning to Stalin: “Give all honour to the glorious God! The proud Belsazar perished in one night!” They were sent into a concentration camp and released only a few years later. Numerous pastors died during and after the arrests.

In Hungary itself a number of Reformed Christians suffered martyrdom at the moment of the communist takeover and especially after the revolution of 1956. Among them the following can be named: István Pógyor, YMCA secretary (+1953), Pastor Béla Pap (+1957), Pastor Imre Szábo (+1955) and Pastor Lajos Gulyás (+1957).

In China the situation of the Christian churches was particularly complicated. The Christian faith, brought into the country by the missionary movement, was always seen as a foreign element by many Chinese. With the takeover of the communist party in China, this judgment became even more determined. The Christian Church was seen as an outpost of the imperialist West. Missionaries left the country. The Chinese Christians sought to establish

themselves as a religious movement in their own country. The *modus vivendi* which seemed to have been obtained abruptly ended with the Cultural Revolution in the sixties and seventies. All Christian denominations, among the Protestant communities especially the non-conformist groups, suffered fierce persecution and had to pay a high price for their Christian faith.

i) Martyrs of the Struggle for Justice

At all times true Christian witness included a commitment to justice. Every serious engagement for the cause of the Gospel inevitably leads to an identification with the disadvantaged, the poor and the excluded. Christian witness has therefore at all times provoked the resistance of the powerful and rich. Numerous Christian martyrdoms in the past had a political and social dimension. The struggle for justice has, however, acquired even greater significance in recent times. As political and social conflicts increase, the flagrant contradiction between the requirements of the Gospel and the present order of society becomes manifest. The number of martyrs for justice and the defence of the environment is growing.

And again, as a rule, the non-violent witnesses of justice fall victim to 'Christian violence'. Because the present order is largely supported by nations with an historically Christian background, the witness is borne in a nominally Christian context, and it can easily happen that the defence of the dominating order will be based on 'Christian' arguments. Both colonialism and the system of Apartheid as well as the dictatorships of Latin America have often enough claimed for themselves 'Christian values'.

i) Mozambique. The Protestant churches in Mozambique had always had a hard time under the colonial regime of Portugal. When in the sixties the open resistance against the Portuguese manifested itself, the mistrust of the colonial authorities against the Protestant churches increased. The founder of the liberation front FRELIMO, Edoardo Mondlane, had received his education in the Presbyterian Church of Mozambique. The leadership of the Church was suspected of collaborating with the military movement. In 1972 seventeen members of the Church were arrested. The president of the Church Zedequias Manganhela and an elder José Sidumo

died under the torture. They had steadfastly affirmed their commitment to non-violence and rejected all accusations of the secret police. Official authorities claimed that Zedequias Manganhela had committed suicide.⁵²

ii) Both in *South Africa* and *Latin America* Reformed churches have played an ambiguous role. Many individuals were engaged in the cause of social justice. But on the whole the witness of Reformed churches has not matched the witness of other churches. Reformed churches bear considerable responsibility, in particular, for the period of the apartheid system in South Africa. Among the witnesses in Latin America the martyrdom of Paolo Wright in Brasil and the sufferings of the Presbyterian Mayas in Guatemala stand out.⁵³

j) The Significance of Prophets and Martyrs in the Life of Reformed Churches

This summary survey over the centuries leaves us with a rich and highly contrasted picture. In every century Christ has been confessed and witnessed to in new ways. Innumerable Christians have stood for the Gospel ‘unto death’. This heritage is for the Reformed churches no doubt a source of inspiration. A great variety of witnesses have preceded us and have in various ways thrown light on Christ’s message.

The presence of their witness today is, however, not a matter of course. Reformed churches tend not to cultivate actively the memory of the heritage of past centuries. It has, in particular, no firm place in the worship of Reformed churches. The witness of prophets and martyrs is commemorated in other ways. The witness of past generations is rather commemorated through story telling, through religious instruction, in historiography and literature.

If at all, special attention is given in Reformed circles to the witnesses who have contributed to shaping the tradition of a particular church and are therefore part of its identity. Their witness will be commemorated in this particular church in manifold ways – through commemorative tablets and museums, through recurring visits to certain places, through sermons and

in teaching, through publications.⁵⁴ But the whole 'cloud of Reformed witnesses' is not the object of any particular attention. Interest is directed to a higher degree towards explaining and celebrating a particular local or national identity than to the witness of the whole church through the centuries. Extending the horizon to include the universality of the whole church and its witness both in time and space is therefore no doubt an urgent requirement for Reformed churches.

III. How can Common Memory Become Possible?

This was the question raised at the beginning of this essay. What can we say to answer it against the background of the historical information which we have sought to consider? Is it possible at all for the churches to develop a common view of their past? Is it possible at all that the confessional 'clouds of witnesses' merge in the great 'cloud of witnesses' of which the epistle to the Hebrews speaks?

a) Our Judgment is Limited

Above all, we need to remind ourselves that our judgment about God's presence in history is limited. Also, independently from the question of mutual recognition, extreme reserve is required. God alone knows the hearts, and only at the end of the times will it become fully manifest who belonged to the true witnesses of the Lamb (Rev. 7, 9s). True, martyrs have given their lives. The readiness to place communion with Christ higher than one's life has its weight. Martyrs are therefore spontaneously remembered in our midst. It is legitimate that they are considered almost as a matter of course to be models of Christian life, giving to the witness of the Church from century to century shape and direction. But our picture of the past is bound to be incomplete. Paul's sentence that we 'see like in a mirror dimly (I Cor 13, 12)' is also valid with a view to the cloud of witnesses. We need to be prepared to discover that the judgments we make today prove to be incorrect.

In the first place the fact needs to be underlined that only a small number of those who gave their lives continue to be present in the memory of the Church. Innumerable martyrs remain unnoticed. What is it which privileges the memory of certain martyrs? Why are others passed over? And often we hear of a saint who was executed together with others whose names are not even mentioned. For some reason all attention falls on the one person while the others remain in the obscurity of namelessness. Even more important is the fact that our judgment on human persons is deceptive. Every human being is an inscrutable mystery. What do we ultimately know about the deep motives driving a person to act? How easily are we misled in our judgments?

And what do we ultimately know about the cause which prompted a martyr to give his or her life? Every witness is delivered in a particular historical context. How did the frontiers arise? Was it really God's kingdom which was at stake or was the martyr ultimately driven by human interests? What was it that the martyrs defended in their struggle against radical atheism – God's sovereignty over the powers of darkness or rather an antiquated political order? Or: where precisely is the dividing line between martyrdom and the suffering under injustice which is shared by millions of human beings?

Finally we have also to remember that the judgment of the Church on its own past is subject to changes. As history progresses the epochs of the past appear in a new light, and therefore also events and persons are assessed in new ways. The understanding of Christian witness changes in the course of such new interpretations. The criteria of judgment evolve. What was regarded as a model by one generation can become problematic to subsequent generations. For centuries asceticism was regarded as a fundamental expression of Christian witness. In retrospect it appears that the Church may have been guided in its judgment too exclusively by this aspect of Christian life. New sensitivities claim their right. Is it, for instance, possible to continue to consider as saint a Christian who called for the use of violence against heretics or witches? What does this mean for our judgment on Augustin or Carlo Borromeo?

b) Can the Church Canonize Persons?

The question is inescapable. Is there really a way to assess with certitude the validity of Christian witness? Both the Churches of the East and the Roman Catholic Church have the conviction that it is within the competence of the Church to decide which witnesses are worthy of veneration. The foundation of veneration is the life and witness of the saint, the cause he or she has served and the spontaneous veneration which his or her witness has provoked in the church. The Church – or more precisely the competent authority in the Church – has to assess whether the veneration is legitimate. It decides whether or not the saint is to be included in the Church's calendar of saints.

There are good reasons for the necessity of such an assessment. Spontaneous piety is unreliable. It can be misled by witnesses who in fact have little to do with the Gospel. It can be clouded by erroneous teaching. Places of veneration can come into existence which call into question the centrality of Jesus Christ and the praise of his unique mediatorship. It is therefore not only understandable but necessary that the Church seeks to verify the authenticity of a witness.

But the canonisations as they are practised today, especially in the Roman Catholic Church, go far beyond this legitimate concern. In the West, in the course of the centuries, the idea found more and more acceptance that the judgment on the holiness of a saint was part of the authority of the Pope. He has to decide whether or not a saint can be included in the calendar of saints. A careful examination of the saint precedes this decision. Both his or her personal life and the cause he or she served are meticulously researched. Counter-witnesses are heard and listened to. An important element for the decision is the fact whether or not miracles occurred in the course of the veneration. The decision is finally made by the Pope; and after the solemn promulgation, it has ultimate validity for the Roman Catholic Church. "Canonisation is the solemn and conclusive judgment of the Pope as the infallible teacher of the Church about the holiness of a servant of God on earth or his or her martyrdom and about his or her transfiguration in heaven – a judgment which finds expression in the inclusion of the saint in the calendar of saints (*canon*, therefore *canonizatio*). According to the opinion of the theologians the Church is infallible in this judgment."⁵⁵

Though this judgment is regarded as infallible, it does not constitute the personal obligation of every member of the Church to venerate the newly declared saint. The veneration of saints can vary from place to place and also from Christian to Christian. But the Church as a whole is committed to the judgment.

The procedure is problematic in more than one respect. It constitutes in fact a presumption of which the Church of Jesus Christ on earth should not become guilty. By issuing definitive decisions on the holiness of persons, the Roman Catholic Church transgresses the limits imposed on the Church in its earthly existence.

Even the most careful and ingenious procedure will not preserve the Church from self-deceptions; and the praxis shows to what extent political and ecclesiastical interests and goals are at work in canonisation trials. By the fact that canonisations have become part of papal authority, every canonisation is at the same time a self-assertion of the central power of the Church. The concern is not only to verify the legitimacy of the veneration but serves at the same time to make manifest the universality of the Church as it is embodied in the Pope. Movements which enjoy the sympathy of Rome almost inevitably receive special attention while other movements remain in the dark.

Above all, however, today's procedure of canonisation does not leave any room for corrections. Other churches are faced with a complete and definitive list. The debate on the mutual recognition of the witnesses of the past moves therefore within extremely narrow limits.

c) The Cloud of Witnesses must Constantly be Reconstituted

The effort to recognize the witnesses of the past can never be ultimately concluded. Like the history of the Church in general, the history of the witnesses requires constantly renewed interpretation. The Church is a wandering people. As new horizons open before it, the understanding of the road already passed through changes. Like the people of Israel (Ex 40, 36-38), the church also is accompanied by a cloud. It gives the people the sign of departure. But the cloud has not exactly the same contours at all times. As the Church meets new challenges it changes its shape. New witnesses are added and familiar witnesses appear in a new light. The history of Christ's presence in the life of the Church is inexhaustible. It offers to the present generation out of its treasures again and again unexpected insights and perspectives. The cloud is present but it must be discovered anew by every generation.

Three considerations are important in this connection:

- Every genuine witness, above all martyrdom, reminds the Church of its true vocation. The Church exists to witness to Jesus Christ, the crucified

and risen Lord. Its witness takes place in a world where power and violence seem to have the upper hand. Its proclamation is therefore more than a mere intellectual contribution. It is the annunciation of God's presence in the midst of forces opposing God's reign. The witness who gives his or her life for God's presence in the world calls the Church back to its *raison-d'être*. Faced with the witness of martyrs, it is unavoidably confronted with the question whether it has fulfilled its vocation. Did it proclaim the Gospel as it was supposed to? Or did it, on the contrary, place the light under the bushel? The Church needs therefore at all times to be reminded of the witnesses who have preceded it in the past, and also of the witnesses whom God raises in its midst today. Especially Reformed Christians have every reason to engage themselves in this confrontation. Reformed churches emphasize the presence of Jesus Christ through his word when and where it is preached today. But they tend to overlook that the word to be communicated is in need of persons, and that it can only be alive in a community praising its liberating power. The cloud of witnesses is not an abstract entity but the embodiment of the word.

- Who is a saint? Who has witnessed to Christ's cross and resurrection? Though we gratefully remember the witness of prophets and martyrs, we know that the last word on its authenticity lies with God. If we – like John in the Book of Revelation – are asked: "Who are these?", our first answer has to be "Lord, you alone know" (Rev 7, 13-14). Ultimately God alone has the authority to reveal the true history of the Holy Spirit. The recognition that our judgment is limited gives us the openness and readiness to call into question what has so far never been called into question.
- Remembering the martyrs of past times confronts us with the phenomenon of violence. Martyrs are in any case victims of violence. Their witness places them in the neighbourhood of the witness delivered by Jesus Christ who is *the* witness or *martys*. They become part of the love which found expression on the cross. But prophets and martyrs also point to failures of the Church. For how often were they rejected by their own church? How often were they left alone in the decisive moment? How often were

only their tombs decorated? Above all history shows that the Church is by no means guided by the witness of non-violence emanating from Jesus. Its history is indeed a mixture of 'error and violence'. The intercourse with the witnesses of the past makes us aware of the degree of self-defence and aggression in our own midst. The history of the mutual persecutions forces upon us an attitude of repentance; and does not repentance lay also the ground for reconstituting the cloud of witnesses in our time?

d) Mutual Recognition

Against the background and on the basis of these considerations, churches can possibly develop common perspectives. It would be an illusion, however, to assume that this can happen in a short time. The separate roads can possibly begin to cross as the separate churches begin to understand themselves as the wandering people of God and seek to advance together. Their past will then increasingly appear to be a common past.

- The presupposition for such a process is the will consciously to turn the history of the past with its heights and depths into a common theme and concern. The history of martyrs deserves special attention in this context. What is their message? What is the significance of their suffering for the whole Church of Jesus Christ? Much has already been achieved in this respect. Churches have explicitly admitted mutual offences and asked for the forgiveness of other churches. But declarations of guilt are only the first step. They do not yet take into account the positive significance of the martyrs of other churches. Is it possible to develop a vision of the Church's history which makes possible this second step?
- Another important effort consists of making mutually accessible the witness of prophets and martyrs. Mutual recognition presupposes knowledge. It even may be possible to confront witnesses of different churches with each other in the framework of ecumenical celebrations.

The martyrologium published by the *Comunità di Bose* represents an indispensable first step in this direction. By combining the calendars of

saints of the various churches, martyrs of different confessional origin appear in the same context. But further work is required. The question of mutual recognition must explicitly be raised. Since not all churches share the tradition of calendars, the survey would need to be expanded.

e) All Saints

The feast of All Saints could provide a clue in the context of this debate. For does this feast not implicitly contain the admission that the ‘army of saints’ by far exceeds the visions which we, with our limited knowledge on earth, develop?

The feast of All Saints goes back to the first centuries. It was celebrated in the East already in the fourth century. In a sermon preached in Antioch in about 380, John Chrysostom explicitly refers to the celebration of “all who have suffered martyrdom in the whole oikumene.”⁵⁶ The feast was celebrated in the East one week after Pentecost. In the West the date of November 1 was chosen.

We celebrate on this day *all* saints, both those whose witness is present in the memory of our churches and the many whose names are known by God alone. We place the past in God’s hands. We thank him for the witnesses who visibly or invisibly have contributed to the building up of the communion; and we ask him to constitute anew the cloud of witnesses which accompanies us on our way.

NOTES

¹ Cf. Karl Schlemmer, *Heilige als Brückenbauer, Heiligenverehrung im ökumenischen Dialog*, St. Ottilien 1997. Francesco Chiovaro, André Mandouze, Pierre Riché, André Vauchez, Jean Delumeau, Bernard Plongeron et Claude Savart, *Histoire des saints et de la sainteté chrétienne*, 11 vol. Paris (Hachette), 1986-1995.

² Wolfgang Beinert, *Evangelisches Kirchenlexikon*, Göttingen 1989, *Artikel Heiligenverehrung*, vol. 2, p. 440ss.

- ³ Gerhard Ludwig Müller (ed), *Die Heiligenverehrung – ihr Sitz im Leben des Glaubens und ihre Aktualität im ökumenischen Dialog*, München/Zürich 1986, p. 6
- ⁴ Dietrich Ritschl, *Konzepte, Ökumene, Medizin, Ethik, Gesammelte Aufsätze*, München 1986, p. 71
- ⁵ Ruth Albrecht, *Evangelisches Kirchenlexikon, Article Martyrium*, Göttingen 1992, vol 3, p. 301.
- ⁶ *Bangalore 1978*, Faith and Order Paper 92, Geneva 1978, p. 200
- ⁷ Comunità di Bose (Riccardo Larini), *Il libro dei testimoni, martirologio ecumenico*, Cinisello Balsamo (Milano) 2002
- ⁸ „Die Idee des Martyriums und die Vorstellung des Märtyrers sind christlichen Ursprungs“, Hans Freiherr von Campenhausen, *Die Idee des Martyriums in der Alten Kirche*, Göttingen 1964 (2), p.1
- ⁹ With good reason Paul Minear gave to his commentary on Matthew the title *The good news according to Matthew, A training manual for prophets*, St. Louis 2000.
- ¹⁰ Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament, *Article martyrs (Strathmann)*, vol. IV, 477 ss. The group of terms is so central in John’s writings that John’s Gospel has been called the book of the martyr, cf. Paul S. Minear, *John, the Martyr’s Gospel*, New York 1984
- ¹¹ *Martyrium Polycarpi* 18,2
- ¹² *Homilia 13,3 in Hebraeos*, PG 63, 93
- ¹³ The synod of Gangra in Paphlagony adopted an explicit resolution against Eusthatius and his disciples who apparently rejected the veneration of Saints.
- ¹⁴ “The first papal approbation of the liturgical veneration of a saint concerned Bishop Ulrich of Augsburg (+993). Requested by emperor Otto III and promulgated at a Lateran Synod by Pope John XV, this canonisation was, from a formal point of view, the result of a synodal decision under the presidency of the Pope ... A decisive moment in the development is represented by the decree *Audivimus* of Pope Alexander III (between 1170 and 1180) who declared illegitimate the veneration of saints without the explicit permission of the apostolic see.” *Theologische Real-Enzyklopaedie, article Heilige/Heiligenverehrung*, vol. 14, 651ss. From the pontificate of Innocence III (1198-1216) the privilege of canonisation in the West exclusively rests with the pope.
- ¹⁵ Already in the mid-fifth century we read in Theodoret, bishop of Cyrrihus and historiographer (395-466): “The philosophers and orators have fallen into oblivion; the masses do not even know the names of emperors and their generals but

everyone knows the names of the martyrs better than those of the most intimate friends,” *Curatio affectionum graecarum* 8,67, PG 83, 1033 A.

- ¹⁶ Smalcald Articles, WA 50, 210, 1-8
- ¹⁷ Preface to Lazarus Spengler’s Confession 1535, WA 38, 313, 10 ss.
- ¹⁸ *Institutio III*, 3, 20
- ¹⁹ *Institutio III*, 24
- ²⁰ Jean Crespin, *Histoire des martyrs*, 1554. Crespin first offers an account of the martyrs of the early church and then leads to Johannes Hus and the martyrs of the Reformation. In a statement to the Sorbonne he declares that the veneration of saints was inadmissible but that «il faut avoir les saints en estime, et en parler révéremment selon que chacun d’eux est excellent en dons ou que Dieu l’a exalté», *Histoire des martyrs.*, ed. Daniel Benoît, 3 vol, Toulouse 1885, 1, 372
- ²¹ Haus-, Schul- und Kirchenbuch, part 2, Stuttgart 1859, 45-51
- ²² Repeatedly the Holy See issued precise rules – Urban VIII through the Breve *Coelestis Jerusalem* (1634) and Benedict XIV through the Apostolic Letter *Iampridem* (1747)
- ²³ Second Vatican Council, Lumen Gentium 49
- ²⁴ During the pontificate of Pope John Paul II (1978-2005) 483 saints have been canonised and 1339 persons declared blessed. In comparison, in the period from 1588 to 2005, the catholic Church has canonised altogether 724 saints and declared 2321 persons as blessed. More than half of all canonisation have been carried out in the recent past.
- ²⁵ Cf Akaki Bakradse, *Ilia Tschawtschawadse*, in Texte der Evangelischen Arbeitsstelle Oekumene Schweiz, Bern 1993 and Lukas Vischer. *Grigol Peradze (1899-1942)*, Mitteilungsblatt der Vereinigung der Freunde Georgiens in der Schweiz, N° 5, Zürich, 1999
- ²⁶ Tertullian, *de praescr.* 3, quid ergo, si episcopus, si diaconus, si vidua, si virgo, si doctor, si etiam martyr lapsus a regula fuerit, ideo haereses veritatem videbuntur obtinere: *ex personas probamus fidem an ex fide personas?* Nemo est sapiens, nemo fidelis, nemo maior nisi Christianus, nemo autem Christianus, nisi qui ad finem usque perseveraverit.
- ²⁷ De unitate 14
- ²⁸ Hist. Arian. 77
- ²⁹ Basilius, ep. 257,1
- ³⁰ The death sentence against Priscillian, bishop of Avila in Spain, illustrates the new situation. He was accused of heresy and executed in Trier by the ‘Christian’

authorities (385 or 386). Cf. Michel Grandjean, *L'ère de Priscillien ou la grande faute du Christianisme?*, *Revue de théologie et de philosophie*, 132, 2000, 361-371

- ³¹ Coll.Carth. D. III 22 (quoted by Campenhausen, p. 169)
- ³² Sermo 328, 4 (quoted by Campenhausen, p. 171). Cf also the 'classical' formulation: *Itaque martyres non facit poena sed causa* (Enarr. In psalm. 43, sermo 2,13)
- ³³ Campenhausen, p. 173
- ³⁴ The phrase can be found in a description of the Waldensians by Walter Map, an English monk, cf. Giovanni Gonnet, *Enchiridion Fontium Valdensium*, Torre Pellice 1958, p. 122-124. The phrase occurs already much earlier, cf. R. Grégoire, *L'adage ascétique nudus nudum Christum sequi*, in: *Studi in onore di O. Bertolini*, Pisa 1972
- ³⁵ Amedeo Molnár, *Die Waldenser, Geschichte und europäisches Ausmass einer Ketzerbewegung*, Göttingen 1980
- ³⁶ During the Albigenian war, in 1214, eight Waldensians were burned at the stake by the order of the Cardinal Legate Robert of Courçon (Molnár p.70). The Inquisitor Bernhard Gui, a Dominican, sent in 1316 eight Waldensians to the stake and sentenced others to life long imprisonment. He even gave the order to dig up the bones of six deceased Waldensians in order to burn them (Molnár, p. 124). Peter of Verona, who was originally an adherent of the Cathar movement but later served the cause of the inquisition and was murdered, was canonized in 1253 (Molnár, p. 16)
- ³⁷ Augusto Armand Hugon, *Storia die Valdesi*, two volumes, Torino 1974
- ³⁸ Amedeo Molnár, *Die Waldenser*, 1980, p. 237ss
- ³⁹ Georg Loesche, *Geschichte des Protestantismus im vormaligen und im neuen Oesterreich*, Leipzig 1930, p. 50 (Tauber) and p. 154 (Kheyser)
- ⁴⁰ Mihaly Bucsay, *Geschichte des Protestantismus in Ungarn*, Stuttgart 1959, p. 22 and 25
- ⁴¹ Francis Higman, *La diffusion de la Réforme en France 1520-1565*, Genève (Labor et Fides), 1992 (cf especially, p.230ss); Joseph Chambon, *Der französische Protestantismus, Sein Weg bis zu französischen Revolution*, Munich 1938, pp.26-27, 30-32. 48
- ⁴² Calvin refers in this letter to a remark which he had made before the conspiracy of Amboise. "Je respondi simplement a telles obiections, que s'il sespandait une seule goutte de sang, les rivières en decouleroyent par toute l'Europe. Ainsi qu'il valoit mieux que nous perissions tous cent fois, que d'estre la cause que le nom

de Chrestienté et l'Évangile fust exposé a tel opprobre,” Letter of April 16, 1561, CR XVIII, col. 426 Cf. also the letter to the faithful in France of November 1559, CR XVII, col. 681 ff.

- ⁴³ Mihaly Bucsay, *Geschichte des Protestantismus in Ungarn*, Stuttgart 1959, pp. 82-101
- ⁴⁴ Elisabeth Labrousse, *La Révocation de l'édit de Nantes, Une foi, une loi, un roi?*, Genève (Labor et Fides) 1985; André Zysberg, *Les galériens, Vies et destins de 60000 forçats sur les galères de France 1680-1748*, Paris (Seuil) 1982 ; *Mémoire d'un galérien (protestant) du Roi-Soleil Jean Marteinhe*, Paris (Mercure de France) 1982.
- ⁴⁵ Joseph Chambon, *Der französische Protestantismus, Sein Weg bis zur französischen Revolution*, München 1938, pp. 155-159
- ⁴⁶ Chambon, *ibidem*, pp. 162-177
- ⁴⁷ Chambon, *ibidem*, pp. 184-206
- ⁴⁸ C. Henry Smith, *The Story of the Mennonites*, Newton Kansas, 1950
- ⁴⁹ Despite the dubious character of Michael Servet his condemnation to the stake remains a dark page of the history of the Reformation. Rightly, the population of Geneva erected a monument in honour of Servet – expressing through an inscription deep regret for the decision.
- ⁵⁰ Bruno Hübsch (ed), *Madagascar et le christianisme*, Paris/Antananarivo 1993, p.229 ss.
- ⁵¹ Allen D. Clark, *A History of the Church in Korea*, Seoul 1971, p. 221ss, 435ss, 445ss, 448ss.
- ⁵² Charles Biber, *Cent ans au Moçambique, Le parcours d'une minorité*, Lausanne 1997, p. 130ss.
- ⁵³ F. João Dias de Araujo, *Inquisition without Burnings*, Rio de Janeiro 1982, Heinrich Schäfer, *Church Identity between Repression and Liberation, The Presbyterian Church in Guatemala*, Studies from the World Alliance of Reformed Churches n° 20, Geneva 1991
- ⁵⁴ The Presbyterian churches in Korea place particular emphasis on the remembrance and veneration of their martyrs. Monuments and pilgrimages play an important role in the life of these churches.