

COMMON WITNESS

Preamble

The document which you have in your hands has been prepared at the request of the Joint Working Group between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches. It is a study document to elicit reaction and criticism and promote discussion on the nature, urgency and forms of common witness. It is the result of several years' labour, and the collection and analysis of reports of actual experience in common witness. These reports, from every corner of the world where the Christian church is present - from Fiji, from France, from Nicaragua, from Korea and Zambia, and many other places - document the emerging tradition of common witness which has become a fact of life in the experience of Christian churches throughout the world. And it is this fact of church life which has made it necessary to think together again about common witness: The world to which an earlier Joint Working Group document on "Common Witness and Proselytism" (1970) addressed itself has changed radically in the intervening decade. And the churches have, over this ten-year period, been drawn together in the confrontation of common problems; and out of their sense of common purpose they have, with one voice, spoken to the crises of our time.

Consciously and deliberately they are on the way to unity. It is a pilgrimage in which there are obstacles which can be overcome only by the love reflected in the lives and deeds of Christians, the common witness given together in an obedient response by those who are the disciples of Jesus Christ.

This document reflects the situation of the pilgrim Church in the world of today. So what it presents is challenging and real. It is not only theological speculation but the theses elaborated here have been hammered out in the process of making common representations to governments on behalf of oppressed peoples against human rights violations. They have come out of joint efforts of educators to create an effective syllabus for the encouragement of growth in faith of the young. They have been generated by the honest dialogues between people of different theological traditions as they have examined the past and have struggled to affirm once more the central truths revealed in Jesus Christ which church traditions have codified and enshrined. They have arisen from the experience of joint Bible study, and prayer in common to which ordinary Christians have increasingly felt called in spite of ecclesiastical divisions. They have come from agreements by Christians of various denominations on how together to bring human comfort and Christian love to the dying. They are born of the unity found in engagement in mission to the world, that cradle of the ecumenical movement. It will take discernment to see this under layer of experience, this hidden structure in the document. But it is there.

And it lies behind the descriptions of the accepted common ground for witness together, of the sources for witness, of the effects of witness, of the problems and tensions, levels and structures for witness. And it lies behind the document's final affirmation of the common witness as a "sign of unity coming directly and visibly from Christ and a glimpse of his Kingdom".

In this paper on common witness, you have an agenda for action and reflection on that task to which the Christian churches of all traditions have pre-eminently been called. It is material for those who have worked in this area, concerned for the mission of the Church, concerned also for its unity' and concerned for the essential interpretation and relation between the unity already existing and the full unity we seek. To the theological affirmations of the first part, you are invited to add your own reflections. To the experiences of common witness found in the second part, in the appendices to the document, you are called to add your own actions and experiences.

This document is, therefore, no final word on the subject of common witness. Only a document which did not take into account the changing reality of the world in which the Church witnesses could pretend to be that. It is, rather, a progress report on the common witness in the years just past. It is a call to continuing witness within the emerging tradition of common witness in the years ahead so that "the world might believe".

1. *The Fact of Common Witness* a) *New Initiatives*

1. All over the world Christians and churches have been increasingly able to give common witness. Formal theological dialogue about unity and the ways to overcome the existing divisions can record notable progress. At the same time the differences of many centuries are not quickly overcome and a good deal remains to be done before Christians reach the point where they are able to make a common confession of faith. Still it is already possible to point to many kinds

of experience which have a positive potential for common witness in spite of ambiguities, difficulties, obstacles.

The impulse to a common witness comes not from any strategy but from the personal and community experience of Jesus Christ. Awareness of the communion with Christ and with each other generates the dynamism that impels Christians to give a visible witness together.

2. It is now quite normal that Christians of different confessions should come together in common celebrations to mark the week of prayer for unity, for some of the great Christian festivals and for many other occasions often of local significance. The liturgical texts and songs, new or old, which are used on these occasions become part of a new common heritage and serve to create a kind of basis for unity which continues long after the actual ecumenical ceremonies and which give even to those who were not present signs by which to identify the Christian mystery.

3. On many occasions Christians from all backgrounds meet to read and study the Bible which thus becomes an integral part of their Christian life. These kinds of gatherings are a powerful ecumenical bond and also an occasion of missionary encounter both because of the wide public interest in the Bible and because of the opportunities they offer of an encounter with secular appreciations of the Bible whether traditional or contemporary.

4. A common witness is given by a growing cooperation in theological work in all its various aspects. Scripture research makes ecumenical editions of the Bible possible. Theological teaching and research as well as the theological formation of the faithful for witness are sometimes being undertaken in common or with collaboration at various levels. Theological and religious publications, as well as the relation of religious literature and art are a field of growing cooperation at the various stages of production and editing and this too is a contribution to evangelization.

5. In a number of places, through their official representatives, the churches have been able to approach the civil authorities together to make known to them the Christian witness in political matters where human rights and dignity as well as spiritual and moral values are at stake. Such official interventions of the churches have become so frequent that in some cases specialized joint bodies have been set up, sometimes also in collaboration with communities of other faiths, with secular associations, or with public bodies at the national or international level.

6. Several common programmes of direct evangelization have been carried out or are under way in the six continents and under various political regimes. In every case local agreements have been made to define the degree of participation of each church and to fix the ground of the pastoral approach to be undertaken by those to be involved in the new proclamation of the Gospel.

7. Many ecumenical groups have been set up on an informal basis. Some have arisen from spontaneous initiatives while others have grown out of centralized or organized movements. All aim at giving a more specific common witness in the different fields of Christian life and conduct. Sometimes this is being done in places or territories newly settled or occupied only temporarily, in situations for example where migration takes place. Other times it is among sections of the population discovering a new social and cultural identity which old confessional traditions have not taken sufficiently into account.

8. A number of ecumenical organizations have come into being in order to enable joint action and other forms of cooperation, thereby promoting common witness as well as expressing the real if imperfect communion between churches. Many of them in which the Roman Catholic Church participates are referred to in the document of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, 'Ecumenical Collaboration at the Regional, National and Local Levels" (1975). The range and diversity of such organizations speaks clearly of the extent to which Christians have become conscious of the need to be and act together in their daily efforts to be faithful to the witness and work of their common Lord. The kind of organization is normally determined by the needs of the place and situation. Hence it runs from joint working groups, to service councils and committees, and to study and action groups of every kind, and further forms may be expected to appear as renewed faithfulness in mission impels Christians towards unity. Of special interest are councils of Churches at various levels which in their own situations make possible significant initiatives of common witness. The Roman Catholic Church has joined in a considerable number of places and even where this has not happened, it has a close working relation with many of them often by means of a joint working group and by participating in some of their programmes.

b) New Consciousness of Common Witness

9. The Holy Spirit, in calling Christians to act together in these unprecedented ways to respond to new situations, has also awakened a consciousness of the urgency of common witness. Churches and church leaders have begun to identify and authenticate these experiences of collaboration and common action, urging that they be continued and intensified.

10. Following the thought of the Second Vatican Council the Joint Working Group between the World Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Church in the study "Common Witness and Proselytism" (1970) reflected on the spiritual gifts shared by Christians (cf. *Unitatis Redintegratio* 4). The study spoke of the privilege and obligation of the churches to give witness to the truth and new life which is theirs in Jesus Christ. For this reason Christians cannot remain divided in their witness. (see par. 11 and 13)

11. The 5th Assembly of the WCC, meeting at Nairobi in 1975 reflected on significant discussions about evangelization in several meetings which had immediately preceded it. The Assembly said, "The confession of Christ holds in one communion our divided churches and the many communities, new and old, within and around them" (*Confessing Christ Today* : 36). There are striking and clear convergences on evangelization in the reports of the Bangkok Assembly on "Salvation Today"; (1973), the International Evangelical Congress on World Evangelization at Lausanne (1974); and the papal document, issued after the 1974 Synod in Rome on evangelization in the modern world, "Evangelii Nuntiandi". The latter called for a greater common witness to Christ before the world in the work of evangelization. (par. 77)

12. In 1979 Pope John Paul II appealed strongly and urgently to all who follow Christ to meet and unite around the one Lord. He acknowledged the need for getting to know each other and removing the obstacles blocking the way to perfect unity, but emphasized that "we can and must immediately reach and display to the world our unity in proclaiming the mystery of Christ; in revealing the divine dimension and also the human dimension of the redemption, and struggling with unwearied perseverance for the dignity that human beings have reached and can continually reach in Christ". "In this unity in mission, which is decided principally by Christ himself, all Christians must find what already unites them, even before their full communion is achieved" (*Redemptor Hominis*, 11,12).

c) Renewal for Witness

13. The Holy Spirit constantly renews Christians and their communities in their relation to Christ. This renewal centres in Christ and calls forth a new obedience and a new way of life which is itself a witnessing communion. The Spirit invites each Christian community to conversion so that it may participate responsibly in the plan of salvation. It is a continuing conversion which renews the commitment of the individual and the community to Christ (vid *Evangelii Nuntiandi* n. 15 & 36). A common renewal requires openness to the Spirit who works in us teaching us in an evolving world to seek clear ways of expressing our faith, ways marked by our mutual love for each other. (John 15,17).

14. The urging of the Holy Spirit to unity and mission through common renewal can open the ears of Christians to hear what God is saying to them through churches and communities other than their own. It is an awakening to active appreciation of the gifts of grace, truth and witness found in those communities. "The gifts which the churches have received and share in Christ have demanded and made urgent a common witness to the world" (*Common Witness and Proselytism* 14). By opening Christians to the world and its needs, the Holy Spirit gives witness to them, impelling them to bring the living communion of Christ in his Church to those people and places where it has not yet come. This will bring into being new communities facing new cultural social and theological situations and challenges.

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II. Christian Witness -Common Witness

a) The Common Ground

15. The command of Jesus Christ and the power of his grace lead the Church to proclaim the Good News he has brought us; finally this Good News is Christ himself. This Gospel message gives Christian communities the common ground for their proclamation. They accept the content of the biblical witness and the Creeds of the early Church. Today they desire to reach beyond what separates them by stressing the essential and returning to the foundation of their faith, Jesus Christ. (I Cor 3,11), (cf. *Common Witness and Proselytism*, 2). They recognize that baptism, as the effective sign of their unity, brings them into communion with Christ's followers and empowers them to confess him as Lord and Saviour. Therefore the Lord's gift of unity already exists among Christians and, although it is not yet realized perfectly, it is real and operative. This unmerited gift requires that witness be borne in common as an act of gratitude and the witness in turn is a means of expressing and deepening unity.

b) The Source of Witness

16. I) The Father

Christian witness has its source in the Father who testified to Christ his beloved Son, sent visibly into the world, He bore witness to him on the cross and by raising him from the dead through the Holy Spirit. So Christ received the fulness of the Holy Spirit to be in the world, himself the divine fulness for the human family (Col. 2,9-10). "When God raised up

his servant, he sent him to bless you" (Acts 3:26; 26:23). Jesus could say: "I am going away and I shall come back to you" (John 14:28). He who "has become for us wisdom and justification, sanctification and liberation" (1 Cor 1:30) has been sent into the world that those who receive him in faith may find in him that sanctification and liberation. God now sends him into the world in the Church which he has made his body in spite of the sin of its members. The disciple can say: "Christ lives in me" (Gal 2:20; cf. 2 Cor 4: 10-12) and "Christ speaks in me" (2 Cor 13:3). Christian witness is an epiphany of Christ who took the form of a servant, and became obedient unto death. (Phil. 2:6).

17. ii) Jesus Christ

Jesus Christ is the one witness of God, true and faithful, (Rev. 3: 14; 1:5; vid. "*Confessing Christ Today*: 8,9,10). The witness he gave to the Father through his life was sealed by the martyrdom of the cross. His death evidenced total dedication to the witness he bore; it was the testimony he gave to himself as the truth that liberates" (John 8:32). The cause of the Father had consumed his life to the point of martyrdom. In his death and resurrection his entire existence disclosed the meaning of the message. Through those events he breathed forth his Spirit to animate his followers, drawing them together in the community of witness, his mystical body which is the Church. It would pay a similar price for the witness which he would give through it (1 Pet. 5:9). From the beginning the followers of Jesus as confessors and martyrs became the vehicle of the Spirit in their suffering unto death, inseparably linked with the inspired words they uttered in the power of the same Spirit.

18. iii) The Holy Spirit

The Spirit plays such an important role in Christian witness that he too can be said to be the witness of Christ in the world: "The Spirit of truth himself who comes from the Father will bear witness to me" (John 15:26). For it is in the Spirit that God raises Christ (Rom. 8:11); it is in the Spirit that he glorifies him (John 16: 14-15); it is the Spirit who convicts the world in the trial which brings it into contradiction with Jesus (John 16:8). The Spirit bears this witness by means of the Church. He makes the Church the body (1 Cor 12:13) and thus the manifestation of Christ in this world. The Spirit is communion (2 Cor 13:13) so he unites us to Christ; and in the same movement, brings about communion among men and women.

19. The Spirit comes upon the faithful and makes them also witnesses of Christ (Acts 1,8). In him the word and action of Christians becomes a "demonstration of spirit and power" (1 Cor 2:4). We must encounter Christ to be his witnesses, to be able to say what we know about him (cf. 1 Jn 1:3-4 ; 4:14). It is the Holy Spirit who enables the faithful to meet Christ, to experience him. Believers are led to witness to their faith before humankind, because the Spirit witnesses to Jesus in their hearts (John 15,16-17; Rom 8:16; Gal 4:6). In the debate between Jesus and the world, he takes the part of Jesus in strengthening believers in their faith (John 16:8 cf. 1 Jn 5,6), but he also deepens the faith of believers by leading them to the whole truth (John 16,13). He is thus the master of Christian witness enabling us to say "Jesus is Lord" (1 Cor 12:3), he is the inspiration and teacher of the Church (John 16:13).

c) The Church

20. The Church received its commission from the Lord Jesus Christ himself, "You shall be my witnesses" (Acts 1:8). It takes upon itself the witness which the Father bore to his Son (cf. Jn 5 :32) when, in front of those who put him to death, he raised him and made him Christ and Lord for the salvation of all (Acts 2 :23,24,36). The Christian witness receives its incarnation and force out of the calling of the People of God to be a pilgrim people giving witness to Christ our Lord in communion with the cloud of witnesses. (Heb. 12:1).

21. Following the apostles (Acts 2:32) the Church today testifies to these saving acts of God in front of the world and proclaims that Jesus Christ is Saviour and Lord of all mankind and of all creation. Such is the object of the Christian witness. Through proclamation and bearing witness, Christians are making known the saving Lordship of Christ, so that the one in whom God wills to achieve this salvation may be "believed in the world" (1 Tim 3:16), so that people may confess "that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father" (Phil 2:11).

The Church as a whole is the primary subject of Christian witness. As the Church is one body of many members, Christian witness is by its nature communitarian. When one of the faithful acts in individual witness this is related to the witness of the whole Christian community. Even when the witness is given by Christians in separated churches it should be witness to the same Christ and necessarily has a communitarian aspect.

d) Characteristics of Christian Witness

22. Witness was a distinctive mark of the Church in the time of the apostles. In giving its witness today the Church continues to be faithful to this apostolic commission. Through the same Holy Spirit it shares their motivation and power. As the body of Christ the Church manifests him in the world. Its nature is to give witness.

23. Witness is what we are before God. It consists in the first place in being. It ought to be rooted in contemplation.

The Church is already giving witness then when it deepens its spiritual life and when it devises new styles of life which commend the Gospel in today's world. In many parts of the world Christians are discovering this afresh by their experiences in small communities, but the need of renewal extends to all manifestations of the life of the Body.

Aware of the failings of those who belong to it, the Church seeks in its worship to be transformed into the likeness of Christ. He must be shown to the world in its members. For this the Church needs the nourishment it draws from prayer, the Word and the Sacraments. It depends on the continual renewal they provide for the authenticity and effectiveness of its witness.

24. Authentic witness is a channel of the divine love to all people. That love expresses itself in discerning the ways in which witness can be given most tellingly in each circumstance or contact. In some sense readiness for martyrdom is the norm of witness since it testifies to the orientation of a life which is itself a sign of a person's conviction and devotion to a cause, even to the point of dying for one's belief. It is conviction incarnated in life which must make proclamation credible. The authenticity of witness is finally to be judged not by the listener's response, but before God. From this point of view there is a gratuitousness about witness that is to be associated with the gratuitousness of God's grace in his dealings with humankind. It is in the life of the witness that the message of the Gospel has to be made present. The life of the witness is the valid exposition of the message. It is from this point that the necessary effort to make the Christian message speak to people and situations has to begin and no ready-made formula can be a substitute. There must always be a dialogue established between situations and people and the Church, for there is a necessary listening process in discovering effective means of witness. Since the medium through which the sign comes to others and communicates its meaning to them is important, the sign has to be given expression in terms of each society and culture.

25. Witness seeks a response, but there is always an element of mystery and miracle about the way in which the witness the Spirit gives to Jesus comes home to the heart of a person. It is always something fresh, often totally surprising and unexpected.

26. The witness of Christ has to be given and shaped by the community which lives in Christ and is animated by a spirit of love and freedom, confidence and joy. Words alone cannot stress sufficiently that the love of God has come to us through Christ, that it has overcome sin and death, and that it lives on among us. It demands a comprehensive witness, credible and full of love, given both by the Christian and the Church in every part of life. Without love such witness is only "a sounding gong or clanging cymbal" (1 Cor 13,1). The liberating action of Christ must mean that witness is given in freedom and with respect for the freedom of those to whom it is addressed.

27. Christian witness also must be given in humility. Its source is in the Father who, by the Spirit, raised Christ from the dead and sends him visibly to humankind by means of those who are his witnesses. It is therefore a commission from God, not something one takes upon oneself. It requires the witness to listen before proclaiming the Good News and to cooperate with the unpredictable leading of the Spirit. It does not provide a blueprint that will guarantee success in all situations. Rather it is the task of a co-worker with God in the service of all peoples.

e) Effects of Witness

28. Witness moves from one unity to another from that of the members of the Body of Christ in the one Spirit to the greater unity in which all things in heaven and earth will come together under the one Head who is Christ (Eph 1,10). Essentially it is a work of reconciliation, of people with God, and with one another. To take part in Christian witness also deepens the unity that already exists among Christians. Witness tends always to extend the fellowship of the Spirit, creating new community. At the same time it is an essential help for Christians themselves. It promotes among them the conversion and renewal which they always need. It can strengthen their faith and open up new aspects of the truth of Christ. As such it is a fundamental part of the life of the community that is fully committed to Christ.

29. When witness is being given in a context of unbelief it often calls forth opposition. The Church has to be ready to pay the price of misunderstanding, frustration and suffering even, on occasion, of martyrdom. From the beginning the reality of the Cross has been the inevitable context of Christian witness (2 Cor 4,8-12). That witness has to be made also before the principalities and powers of this age (Eph. 6,12; cf. Rom 8,38-39). The experience of Christians in exile, prison and the arena in other times is often repeated today. The Church has to bring its message of love and reconciliation to even the most difficult situations so it is not surprised when its witness has to be given even at the cost of life itself.

f) Common Witness

30. When he prayed that all be one so the world might believe, (Un 17,21) Jesus made a clear connection between the unity of the Church and the acceptance of the Gospel. Unhappily Christians are still divided in their churches and the testimony they give to the Gospel is thus weakened. However there are even now many signs of the initial unity that

already exists among all followers of Christ and indications that it is developing in important ways. What we have in common, and the hope that is in us, enable us to be bold in proclaiming the Gospel and trustful that the world will receive it. Common witness is the essential calling of the Church and in an especial way it responds to the spirit of this ecumenical age in the Church's life. It expresses our actual unity and increases our service to God's Word, strengthening the churches both in proclaiming the Gospel and seeking for the fulness of unity.

31. Yet the tragedy of our divisions remains with us at the focal point of our testimony to Jesus: the Holy Eucharist. It is urgent that all Christians intensify their prayer for the full realization of this unity and witness.

"This fellowship in prayer, nevertheless, sharpens the pain of the churches' division at the point of eucharistic fellowship which should be the most manifest witness of the one sacrifice of Christ for the whole world" (*Common Witness and Proselytism*, 16).

g) Situations of Common Witness

32. Common witness is called for in a great many different situations. The variety of groups and individuals taking part in some act of common witness should make it possible to have a more realistic awareness of the situation, to adapt to it in solidarity and to orient the witness concretely to it.

33. This does not at all mean diluting the truth of the Gospel to fit every situation. Rather those who hand it on and those who receive it must undergo change. Thus common witness should ring about the creative transformation of a given situation.

34. Witness does not mean debating possibilities but brings people to face reality. It calls forth reflection, discussion, decision. In every thing those who witness should show they have Good News to proclaim. The Kingdom of God whose coming they have to proclaim in word and deed consists in "justice, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom 14:17).

h) In the World

35. In bearing this witness Christians are committing themselves to the service of others, for it is the Good News of God they are bringing (Acts 13:32, 33). Through proclaiming the cross and resurrection of Christ they affirm that God wills the salvation of his people in all dimensions of their being, both eternal and earthly.

36. The whole of creation groans and is in travail as it seeks adoption and redemption. (Rom 8,22). Salvation in Jesus Christ has cosmic dimensions. Christian witness is given not only to fulfil a missionary vocation but also to respond to the aspirations of the universe. Human needs and the challenge of a broken and unbelieving world compel the churches to cooperate with God in using his gifts for the reconciliation of all peoples and things in Christ.

The contemporary thirst for meaning, for a spiritual base, for God, is also an occasion for common witness by the full manifestation of Jesus Christ in prayer, worship and in daily life.

37. The search for Gospel values such as human dignity, justice, peace and fraternity invites participation by a common witness, which always points to Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour of all. This means Christian involvement in matters of social justice in the name of the poor and the oppressed. We must relearn the patristic lesson that the Church is the mouth and the voice of the oppressed in the presence of the powers that be. Thus Christian witness will mean participation in the struggle for human rights, at all levels, in economic sharing and in liberation from social and political oppression. All is a part of the task required by obedience to the truth of God and its consequences.

38. In fact in the last decade there has been a most positive advance in a wide variety of common witness at all these levels of christian life. A growing sensitivity to the manipulative attitudes and behaviour often fostered by contemporary cultures is forcing Christian churches and communities to a drastic reappraisal of their relation to the world in mission, and is bringing them together to witness to the gifts of truth and life bestowed in Christ, which are the source of their life and which provide access to salvation (cf. *Common Witness and Proselytism*, 11).

III. Realizations of Common Witness

a) Occasions and Possibilities

39. Christ's commission to his Church (Matt 28: 18-20) and the gift of the Spirit to enable this task to be fulfilled, impose a missionary obligation upon Christians in every circumstance. It causes them to cross social and geographical boundaries: yet it is present also in their everyday surroundings. It demands obedience even in situations where explicit preaching is impossible and witness has usually to be silent.

40. The inspired phrase from the Faith and Order meeting in Lund 1952 invited the churches to do all things together except where fidelity to conscience would forbid. Yet so many years later we are not yet putting this into practice. It is a principle which if applied would multiply enormously the occasions of common witness, putting it in the daily agenda of each Church. Its intent was expressed in "Common Witness and Proselytism, 13": "Christians cannot remain divided in their witness. Any situation where contact and cooperation between churches are refused must be regarded as abnormal".

41. By coming together in witness it becomes possible to know and recognize the manifold gifts that God has granted to his Church. The peculiar history, tradition and experience which each brings enriches the quality of the common witness. Instead of each losing identity, it is seen in the wider context of the one Church willed by Christ in which all are to grow to the fulness of Christ in whom is their final destiny. Specific gifts are not eliminated but rather increase their potential for witness and the value of other traditions is discovered and enhanced.

42. Thus common witness influences the whole of our witness to Jesus Christ.

It does not eliminate distinctive witness but enriches it and it centres the emphasis in the common treasure of the Gospel Jesus Christ is Lord and Saviour. The invitation to join the family of the Church will always be made with due respect to the integrity of the Gospel message, to the catholicity of the Church and the fulness of unity which is sought. The respective witness of various confessions could often respond to geographical, linguistic and cultural situations. As Christians and churches grow together in unity, the witness given in separation will become progressively a dimension and complementary part of the total witness given by all Christians to Jesus Christ.

43. Common initiatives defending and promoting human dignity are by their nature a privileged field of common witness. The group engaged in them often have a deep experience of Christian community especially when they draw their strength from common prayer and bible work and to the extent that the members are rooted in their own liturgies. Such communities of service are a sign of the Kingdom.

44. Evangelization by direct proclamation which is organized together, retreats, bible courses, study and action groups, religious education undertaken jointly or in collaboration are an expression of growing acceptance of the primacy of the saving truth and essential kerygma which announces Jesus as Lord and Saviour, present and acting now in his Spirit. Therefore, joint or coordinated pastoral and missionary actions are instances of common witness or at least prepare the ground and the preliminary structures to enable it.

45. Intrinsic clarity of meaning is a test which must be applied to witness. Do people really experience it as a good gift coming from above? Is it transparent to those of good will?

46. Common witness is also given through reciprocal support. The hope is to see Christians of all confessions side by side as they share by word and deed in testifying to the saving will of God. For various reasons of language, history, ideology this is not always possible. In such a case the witness given by one church or group of Christians can however be supported by the prayers, gifts, visits and sympathy of others. Thus the witness given by Orthodox, Catholics, Anglicans or Protestants becomes in a sense the vicarious means of presenting the witness of other Christians too. So the faithful witness given by one church in a particular place can be part of the rich and diverse witness of the whole Church. The Church cannot shut its eyes to the sufferings, injustices and violence taking place within a large proportion of humankind but when she is not able to express openly the cries and appeals of all those who suffer she should seek to make possible a silent witness of solidarity and intercession.

b) Problems and tensions

47. We recognize that for "conscience sake" our churches sometimes feel obliged not only to a separate witness, but even to a contradictory one. While we pray and work for the fullness of church unity we recognize the existence of divisions as a reality to be taken into account. The honesty of our common witness is demonstrated by the open and public nature of our disagreement. We believe that the expression of different solutions for ethical issues will highlight the importance and credibility of our common witness. A divided witness can become a counter witness. The reality of our divisions will therefore always be a call to common prayer, study and research, in the hope that we will grow in unity and love.

48. In its witness the Church addresses the Gospel to a specific situation or context. Common witness also in order to be effective must be concrete. The challenge and condition for common witness may be very different from one situation to another. Cultural, historical and, socio-political factors will contribute to the shaping of it.

This can however lead to tensions and even new divisions within one church or between churches. What is a powerful common witness in one place may be perceived as a source of division in another. The more honestly this problem is being recognized the more creative the tension may become.

49. The activities entailed in giving witness can bring tensions. Some of these are healthy, others create or exacerbate tension between or within churches. It may be for example that some Christians, who are active in local communities feel the pace of ecumenical advance should be more rapid. In their own informal experiences of living, working and praying together they may have discovered a communion which they claim is so developed as to call for expressions that go beyond what official teaching or discipline permit. In such cases it can be very difficult to work out a solution that respects the values at stake and the integrity of those concerned. Hence the need to keep alive dialogue and communication. The occurrence and difficulty of such situations seems to indicate there should be some study of them as an ecumenical problem that calls for attention.

50. Christians of all churches agree that membership in the Church is an essential part of the Christian message. The Gospel invitation to accept Christ as Lord and Saviour is an invitation also to be a member of His Body, a member of a local church in communion with all the churches, which together live the word of God in faith, sacrament and witness.

51. When churches are still divided and not yet at one in understanding the Gospel of Christ, this necessary connection of witness and community, of proclamation and church-membership raises the question of those kinds of witness which are distorted by certain motives, attitudes, behaviour and methods. These are called proselytism and must be evaluated as an unworthy kind of witness. The problem has been stated and treated in the 1970 study "Common Witness and Proselytism" par 25-28. Much of the material is still useful for situations where the problem is actual.

52. In the first place proselytism includes whatever violates the right of the human person, Christian or non-Christian, to be free from every type of physical coercion, moral restraint or psychological pressure which could deprive a person or a community of freedom of judgement and responsible choice. The truth and love of God must always be offered and accepted in freedom.

53. Proselytism also means anything in the proclamation of the Gospel which replaces selfless love by personal or group egoism, substitutes the primary trust in the surprises of the Spirit with an over-confidence in one's own predetermined methods and programs, fears the truth by misrepresenting the beliefs and practices of other religious communities in the hope of winning adherents.

c) Levels and Structures

54. Common witness happens and is needed at all levels of church life. Each has its own importance. Local churches and communities have evident occasions for common witness. They share the same cultural milieu and are challenged to give a clear testimony to Jesus Christ. Even small changes in attitudes at local level are a beginning for the renewal of the whole Church. There should be always an interplay between witness on the local level and that on regional, national and world levels. It is important that the work for common witness takes place at all levels simultaneously.

55. Ecumenical groups with a specific vocation give common witness at a special level. These groups are often of a charismatic or monastic type. In dialogue with the churches they are free to search for new ways to express Christian life and common witness. They should be given support and account be taken of their findings where these have value. Church leaders could then recommend the new forms of common witness that have been tested by such groups and found to be of value.

56. The renewal or rediscovery of the life of monastic and religious communities in a number of churches has a special significance for common witness. In the first place it gives a new impetus to witness as such. The monastic aim springs from the desire to seek God, to bring enthusiasm for Jesus Christ into the daily routine, and to enable confession of him to dominate and colour a particular form of human existence. It embodies in a special way the keen desire that others, hearing his word and the message it contains, should also come to follow Christ. It does this especially through the witness of a Christian existence of a very deep and intense kind. Thus it makes the faith-inspired motivation which enlivens all the People of God stand out in bold relief.

57. As the communities of religious life in the different churches are discovering each other and their various traditions of life and witness across confessional separations they have the potential for a major contribution to common witness. Their singleness of purpose along with their freedom to adapt to special tasks have already enabled them to contribute substantially to the ecumenical movement, but, so far, this is only a beginning in terms of the considerable spiritual resources which accrue to the vocation to the religious life.

58. Religious communities have a key role to play in spiritual ecumenism and in the prayer for unity. Their regular pattern of intercession gives them abundant opportunity of supporting spiritually the common witness of Christians and churches. Here those communities devoted to the liturgical and contemplative life can make a special contribution.

59. All groups, at local, regional or national level have the responsibility of encouraging and inspiring each other so that they can provide examples of common witness to be used and promoted at the world level. It is highly desirable that the churches seek means of giving expression to common witness at a world level. Here the Joint Working Group between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches may be able to give ideas and explore possibilities.

60. Ecumenical structures, at different levels, prove a normal occasion, to discover, plan and promote common witness. The specific purpose of such ecumenical structures is to encourage the churches in common witness and service.

61. These structures are of very diverse nature and range from national councils of churches through a whole variety of structures for ecumenical cooperation, to informal meetings of persons responsible for different aspects of the church's life. All can help to provide the consultation necessary to discover the situations that demand common witness.

62. These structures have a varied scope:

- a) to encourage manifestations of common witness at local level
- b) to support those manifestations with the worldwide experience of Christians engaged in common witness and working to promote unity.
- c) to introduce the ecumenical dimension into communities or groups which are already engaged in Christian witness in specific areas.
- d) to organize national and regional events of a witnessing character.

IV. Struggle and Hope

63. Common witness is deeply rooted in our faith and is a demand of the very Gospel we proclaim. Its urgency is underlined when we realize the seriousness of the human predicament and the tremendous task waiting for the churches at present. Common witness is not an abstract theological concept. It is very much more than friendly ecumenical relations. It is a responsible way of relating to the human problems of today: the growing traffic in human life through prostitution or in drugs, the corruption in international economic practice, the armaments race, the growing power of the mass media in shaping people's minds. We discover that those challenges touch each and all of the churches when we look beyond our own and see the millions of people who do not know the Gospel of Jesus Christ. There is a pressing need to join forces to proclaim the Gospel of the Kingdom to all peoples. A common effort is required that will multiply our capacity to give a clear and powerful witness. Faced with the challenge of the world, the churches in joining forces to witness to Jesus Christ will find new spiritual strength, new relevance for the human predicament.

64. Often it is socially and politically more difficult to witness together since the powers of this world promote division. In such situations common witness is particularly precious and Christlike. Witness that dares to be common is a powerful sign of unity coming directly and visibly from Christ and a glimpse of his Kingdom.

65. In a world where there is confusion, where many people seem uncertain, the search for unity and a common witness are an act and sign of hope. Unity is required to face the challenge, and as the churches respond they will in turn be led into the fuller unity which the Lord wills and by the means He wills. It is an integral part of the hope that all humankind will be confronted with the full presence of God in judgment and grace. Waiting for the eschatological test of their witness, already rejoicing in the risen life of Christ through the gifts of the Holy Spirit, Christians are required to give courageous account of the hope that is in them.

APPENDIX

COMMON WITNESS IN PRACTICE

a) Common witness in Koinonia/diaconia experiments

BECAUSE OF HIS LOVE

It was a long dry summer, the summer of 1976. We -just a few of us -had spent a long time preparing for the meeting, meditating and praying. Now it was here. There we were, sixty men and women from many different parts of the world. What brought us together was that for a greater or shorter time we had devoted our lives to diaconia – to Christian service. But also the fact that all of us had an indefinable feeling that this service – or diaconia, as some call it – was withering from within. We were tired of justifying it by its very existence, or by our devotion, or by its results, or by the continuity of our agencies. We wanted to rediscover together its original inspiration and our ‘first love’, to return to the well-springs and take a long refreshing drink at the source.

We found it impossible to keep to ourselves what we had received in that scorching 1976 summer. We had an unwritten commitment to make our discovery widely known and to seek out others who were on the way to similar discoveries. A small survey was conducted, therefore. We offer here three of the many responses which seem to us to provide a first verification of what we had glimpsed. These stories in their various ways confirm the reality of our own story.

1. *From Celebrating to Welcome and Sharing*

– The following story is told by a protestant community of deaconesses of Reully, France.

It is now over a hundred years since our institution came into being. Now many sick people have been cared for in a hospital which has become busier and busier and more and more modern over the years. How often we have worshipped together to reinforce the commitment of our community! Our house was flourishing, people spoke of the good work we were doing, we were sometimes held up as an example for young people growing up in a selfish and tough world.

Some of us upset this a few years ago. While not calling in question the standards of devotion and fidelity set by our order, we were looking for something more than the daily life of our ministry, we were looking for a deeper fellowship in communion with Christ. We committed ourselves to a more demanding style of prayer, focussed not so much on our role as healers, as in the past, but more on praising the Lord than on the experiences of his servants. The results of this change still astonish us!

On the one hand, something happened at the heart of our traditional routine. Caught up in the rhythm of praise we became aware as never before of our dignity as sisters; our sisterhood consisted only superficially in the practice of the same calling, however noble this was, or in the common knowledge that we had consecrated our lives to this calling. Because we were able to praise the one Lord together our unity as a community proved far deeper. A number of us then discovered that we had been putting the service first and not remembering sufficiently the author of this service who alone renews it by his love. Celebration is the essential part of diaconia.

But that was not all. We often imagined our relationships with others were right and good simply because we cared for them when they were ill. But in our renewed encounter with Christ listening to us we found ourselves asking whether we really listened to these others, whether we knew how to receive something from them, in other words, whether we made them welcome. A whole new aspect of our calling was flooded with light. Patterned on the example of our Lord’s diaconia, our own diaconia has to be performed not just in the traditional area to which we are dedicated but also in our openness and sensitivity to those who, though different from us need to be welcomed and listened to.

Gradually we took steps to become available to welcome others; ourselves Christians of the Reformed tradition, we made contact with Catholic sisters and invited them to spend some time in our house so that our common prayers and mutual exchanges would be that much the more widened. This was the breakthrough; the way was open for many others groups to follow, Christian and non-Christian alike: ecumenical meetings, families representing a mixture of Christian traditions, questing young people, all seeking open doors and open hearts.

Far from being shaken and threatened by these comings and goings, our community gained in strength. Being sought by so many newcomers, it became much more aware of its role as witness and realized the need to be renewed in prayer and celebration. Everything was given to us at the same time, even unexpected opportunities of becoming established in other places beside our mother house. Then came an appeal to join with other deaconesses and sisters of a Catholic convent to open up a prayer centre and to conduct spiritual retreats. This is the point now reached in our experience; a point at which the sharing of faith influences the direction of our ministry of service as well as being a new stage on the way to radiant Christian unity.

2. *Witnessing with Non-Christians*

– In this next story we find ourselves in a distant country where Christians are only a tiny minority, the fruit of western

missions. The narrator is a citizen of this country, Ghana.

The impressive buildings of the medical mission, on the outskirts of the town, were well known to us in my family, even if from a distance. People who had received treatment there told us how kind the white sisters were who had welcomed them. Quietly and lovingly these sisters spent most of their time in the hospital, only rarely going into town to do some shopping, dressed always in their habit, evocative of the foreign religion. I myself was living with my family in another district altogether. I had my work, my family, my free time, and very few contacts in the mixed society of my country.

Then everything happened very quickly. My wife fell ill and had to be taken to the hospital run by the sisters. One day one of the sisters, to whom my wife liked especially to talk, asked her directly : 'Do you think we could manage to live together ? ' Seeing the surprise on my wife's face, the sister explained that three of them wanted to really share the daily life of the country to which they had been sent. What better way of doing this than by sharing the everyday life of a family! My wife put me in the picture and since she was still unwell, I found myself thinking that the presence of other women at home might help her a lot when my wife returned from hospital. So we found more spacious lodging and moved in.

What a strange adventure! A more incongruous association could not be imagined: three single western women, all Christians, and a couple with their children who had always lived in accordance with the customs of their own people. The sisters had to make the greater effort: they abandoned their habit and assumed the style of dress of our women; they adopted our food and our way of life, their days became the same as ours, except for the first hour in the morning and the last hour of the evening, when we could hear them singing and praying aloud in their room. When we asked them about this, they told us that these two hours were the most important of the day, and that they were ready to share them with us like everything else.

It was not long before our group grew. We were joined by a teacher, an interpreter, a midwife and two young women who were seeking to become nuns. Altogether we represented five different cultures, yet from one and the same community; the One whom the sisters celebrate is the strong invisible link. They say that our strange association has brought them to a much deeper understanding of the faith they have professed for so long.

Constituting together, as we do, the living witness of a true community, we are able to be a meeting place and forum for friendly cooperation between the too numerous churches in the area. The diaconia of the sisters is jointly supported by the Catholic parishes, and the Methodist and the Presbyterian congregations. The people are surprised at what has happened, because ancient barriers have been broken down and preference given to practical service to others. We now have a community in the service of all.

3. In the Service of the Destitute

– The setting of this third and last story is a large European city Stuttgart (FRG) and the speaker is an ordained Catholic deacon.

By assigning me a mission of pastoral care among the destitute, my bishop veritably marked my life with the sign of the cross. In the name of the Lord, I have stepped into the world of suffering and failure, where despair seems to have made a permanent home. I work in the municipal home for men which lodges 180 homeless unemployed and in addition has a night-shelter for tramps. The staff works at their social tasks and my cooperation with them presents no problems. But I am there as a witness of Christ the Servant, not so much to give assistance to these men who are or who believe themselves to be irrevocably rejected by society, but rather to initiate a dialogue with them.

What have I been doing for so many years, then ? I have tried to make contact with each one of them, to listen to these castaways and to receive something from them. The young people of my parish agreed to help me by taking part in group meetings which I organize every Sunday morning. Together we have stimulated discussions in which every one can speak freely. The young people have sung and taught the residents songs. Speaking is not the only thing or the main thing, what really matters is witnessing to a quiet and warm presence to help these men to come out from their solitude and their feeling of abandonment.

I should have said earlier that two service organizations work alongside each other in this home: the Catholic organization Caritas, of which I am the agent, and the Protestant Aid Society which also employs an agent, a deacon. Two men, two Christians, two deacons, therefore, are doing the same work in the same setting; they have the same contacts with the police, the parishes and the hospitals. Is it even conceivable that they should each work independently, each for himself ? In October 1977, I finally broached the matter with my colleague and told him of my concern, and found a brother quite prepared to go along with me. So we pooled our resources and together drew up plans for the project: 'Counselling and Pastoral Care for Men in Special Social Difficulty '. There is now only one Christian programme in the service of the municipal home.

We are firmly convinced that at the level where we work, a denominational ministry would be totally inadequate; we are forced to practical ecumenism because the distress of the residents of the home is strictly 'interconfessional '. And we must continue in this way. I have therefore arranged that, on my departure for service elsewhere, everything can continue as before when my successor comes. For what we have done is not a merely personal agreement between two friends; one and the same Lord has created unity and this Lord does not pass on.

* * *

What conclusion are we to draw? The 'diaconal models' we have just presented, despite their apparent modesty, confirm in depth what was perceived by the men and women who conferred together in the summer of 1976. All three experiences were the fruit of a deep communication with the God of love, the people concerned in all three cases were seeking a service which will in turn engender anew among human beings the need to come together to serve in a new way. There is an unbroken chain linking communion to service and service to communion, but we have to begin at the beginning, which is Love.

There is no suggestion here of perfection and triumphalism. The people who have written to us do not hide the difficulties and obstacles they encounter. But they add with simplicity: we are en route, pilgrims on this Love which will one day be complete. Finally, they are all sure that they are contributing to the unity of the Church and even experiencing this unity in great depth. As they serve together, uttering the same Gospel, announcing the same deliverance, are they not already the one Church? And how easy it is to understand them when they long for the day when it will at last be possible for them to share the one bread at the one table which they have already prepared.

*Koinonia-Diakonia
Working group*

January 1980

b) Common witness in the promotion of Human Rights

DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN KOREA

1) *National Council of Churches in Korea Consultation on Human Rights*

The following declaration came out of a Consultation on Human Rights sponsored by the National Council of Churches in Korea, which took place 23-24 November 1973 in Seoul. Among the thirty participants who signed the paper are Cardinal Kim of the Roman Catholic Church; Ms. Ok Gil Kim, president of Ewha Women's University; Rev. Chai Choon Kim, former dean of Hankuk Theological Seminary; Mr. Kwan Wu Chun, former editor-in-chief Dong-A Daily newspaper; and Ms. Toe Young Lee, prominent lawyer.

Human rights are the supreme right given by God.

God, who made humans according to his image, acts to liberate humanity from all sorts of bondage and to establish a society in which no humans are violated in terms of their fundamental human rights.

The Church takes the firm establishment of human rights as its highest task, and believes that its historical commitment lies in establishing human rights, upon which the survival of individual persons and social development are dependent. The Korean National Council of Churches holds the Consultation on Human Rights to pursue effective ways to accomplish human rights. Out of the firm belief that the mission of the Church in Korean society is the firm establishment of human rights, the consultation adopted the following statement:

In present Korean society, human rights are being ruthlessly destroyed. Politically the people of Korea have lost their rightful sovereignty. "Democracy" is nothing but an empty slogan. All freedoms are suppressed. In a situation in which the people are robbed of even freedom of faith, the Church should deeply repent and abandon its past attitude of timidity and unconcern, and here affirm anew that establishment of human rights must begin with the struggle to recover freedom.

Specifically, as top priority, the Church must go forward with all its resources to achieve solutions in the following areas, for the protection of human rights.

1. *Human Rights in the Academic World*

The government should immediately withdraw surveillance from the academic community, and restore academic freedom. The students who have been arrested in the course of struggling for the restoration of democracy must be immediately released. Faculty members who have been forced to resign must be allowed to return to their posts.

2. *Human Rights of Women*

The task of expanding women's rights in Korea is most urgent. "Kisang", the prostitution business which is either promoted or tacitly approved by the authorities under the guise of promotion of tourism, must be immediately stopped.

3. *Human Rights of Workers*

Workers are entitled to rightful treatment according to the Labor Standards Law. For this purpose minimum wages and a social welfare system for workers must be established.

4. Human Rights of journalists

The realization of human rights begins with the realization of freedom of speech. The government must stop surveillance and censorship of the communications media. For the purpose of expanding the freedom of speech, journalists must be guaranteed their status and rights.

Looking into the present reality of our nation, we deeply feel our heavy responsibility to face all the above tasks. Whatever happens, above all, the sovereignty of our people should be restored in the constitution. We Christians, in order to solve such problems, firmly resolve the following:

1. We pledge our churches to preach the gospel that liberates the oppressed.
2. The mission of the Church is not merely the salvation of the individual soul, but the social salvation that saves humans from the structural evils of society.
3. The Church must concentrate its energies in struggling for the establishment of human rights.

We, living in the international community, fight for human rights as part of the Church ecumenical. This struggle is to realize the goal of world peace and the restoration of humanity. We as the community of faith declare herewith that this is a continuous struggle for the realization of the Kingdom of God.

ii) *To the National Priests' Corps for the Realization of Justice*

In the context of the preceding common Declaration the kind of witness described here has become possible.

Kim Chi Ha, a Catholic poet, wrote in prison the Declaration of Conscience for his defence against the KCIA charge that he is a communist. In it the poet expresses his personal convictions on politics and religion, affirming his revolutionary faith, and also exposes the tortures, physical and psychological, inflicted by KCIA on him to force him to sign the "confession". The following letter was attached to the Declaration of Conscience and addressed to the National Priests' Corps for the Realization of Social Justice. It was smuggled out of his prison cell and again out of the country. Since then the poet is said to be under 24 hour electronic surveillance by television.

Praise to the Lord !

How are you all ? Thanks to the Lord's mercy and your prayers, I am fine.

I am in solitary confinement in a dark cell and forbidden to write or read, even Scripture. I spend each day in meditation, surrounded by these gloomy walls. Nonetheless, my spirit is closer to the Lord than ever before. Not a single ray of sunlight reaches me now but I cannot forget those brighter days when your powerful cries for justice and mercy shook the citadel of this tyranny we live under. Buoyed by your call for freedom, my soul has repeatedly burst out of my cell and over the high prison walls to be with you in the desperate struggle. As long as the Lord is at my side and you continue your dauntless movement out there, I have no misgivings about this tribulation the Lord has presented me as a sign of His divine will. I only hope I am devout enough to persevere in adversity and attain spiritual renewal. But I have been anxious recently and I decided to write this letter.

According to my lawyers, some of you have believed the government's vile charge that I am a Communist and are having doubts about me.

I am not a Communist. My opposition to oppression and exploitation and my hopes for revolution aren't because I am a Communist but because I am a radical Catholic. I realize that I may be misunderstood but I am not afraid of that. I am far more concerned that this government conspiracy may eventually lead to suppression of your activities. This is what has been troubling me.

As you know, the authorities are trying to fabricate a case against me by alleging that I am a Communist who infiltrated the Catholic Church. They call me a treacherous, cunning Communist agent, pretending to be a democrat. One can easily imagine that the real target of this nefarious attack is your Association and the activities of all democratic elements, including both the Catholic and Protestant churches, to restore democracy in South Korea. The government's objective apparently is to charge the entire democratic movement, including the students, with being "pro-Communist" and launch a new, sweeping wave of repression.

Perhaps it is presumptuous for me to say this, but now is the time when you must be most determined and resolute. I can wish for nothing more than that your passion for bearing this cross will become even stronger.

The Church is a beacon in the stormy, dangerous waters. It lights the way to shore. Thus the people, foundering in agony, look up to the Church with such respect.

The Association's activities are especially a symbol of hope not only for the future of Korea but also for the people of the Third World.

This responsibility is a great honour for Koreans and also a burden, a painful duty. If it is God's will, no matter how heavy the burden, we have no choice but to accept it. You priests have already joyously accepted this grave responsibility. The heavier the burden the more magnificent will be the Lord's will, your conduct and the relationship between your actions and the people's salvation. The greater the duty and the more onerous the task, the greater will be the respect and trust afforded to the holy Church by the afflicted people.

You priests bear this responsibility. To work for both the restoration of democracy and the people's material welfare is to tread a perilous path indeed. However, this very difficulty distinguishes the Association from ordinary

political activities. I believe that your activities constitute a collective, prayerful, ascetic bearing of the cross, and a pilgrimage to heaven.

No matter how important national security may be regarded, it cannot take precedence over the Lord's command for human revival. Even granting the importance of national security, only the unity of the people assures it. And democracy is a prerequisite for unity. That is precisely why the movement to restore democracy is the most compelling task before the people and our Church.

There is no other way to achieve national unity than for the regime to acknowledge its responsibility for the disasters it has brought upon the republic and to resign. Please do not be misled by the government's sophisticated duplicity. Let God's word ring out and shatter this oppressive silence.

The Association is the only hope of salvation. Please light the way for me, a humble servant of the Lord, and for the brethren. Please, with the help of God's limitless power, make your actions the salvation and joy of our people now so overwhelmed with hunger and sorrow.

I firmly believe that the Lord gives nothing to those who seek indolence but to those who seek righteousness all things shall be given.

God bless you.

May 14, 1975

Kim Chi Ha

c) Common Witness through Bible work

Common love for the Bible has become an important motivation for common witness. In every part of the world common Bible translations are being published and recommended to all Christians. As a result, more and more members of different Churches discover that the Bible speaks to them in their situation so that they try to look for ways of communicating its message to those around them.

1. *Common Bible translation results in common witness in Samoa*

Samoa society is entirely Christian and the structures of village life express this in many ways, not least in the practice of church-going and family prayer. The Congregational Church has the largest number of adherents while the Roman Catholic and the Methodist Churches are next in size.

From the days of the first missionaries there had been strong, and at times bitter, conflicts between Christians. In the mid-fifties there were contacts between a few Catholic priests and the Congregational College at Malua. Among other things the conversation touched on the possibility of a common version of the Bible, a practical idea since there is only one language on the island. The problem became urgent in 1960 when the plates of the old Protestant Bible were worn out. It was decided that the time had come to make a new and better translation and in 1962 the Catholics and the Methodists were invited to join the Congregationalists to create a joint translation committee. Representatives from these Churches took part in the weekly work sessions which went on over several years. The project was made known to all the Christians in Samoa and it became something of a symbol of a new relation between the Churches.

In 1969 the work was completed and all the Churches took part in a joint service to receive the new Bible and give thanks for it. By this time the new emphasis on Scripture reading in worship and the use of the vernacular in the liturgy brought this new common Bible prominently before the Roman Catholic Christians as well as before the Protestants who adopted it in their worship. The widespread custom among Christians of all confessions of having family evening prayers in the home every evening at a set time was another occasion for using the Bible. It was even possible to prepare an agreed set of texts for the family worship and also to draw up a common proposed order for prayer.

Such was the impact of this common Bible translation that a new kind of relationship between Christians had come into being over the years when the work was going on. The Week of Prayer for Christian unity and the common use of Christian education materials became possible so that it was natural to form a council of Churches including the Roman Catholics. In Samoa today it is normal for the Congregational, Methodist, Anglican and Catholic Churches to be and to act together.

2. *Common Evangelism in Thailand, Sri Lanka and Lebanon*

In November, 1979, two hundred Christian, Roman Catholic and Protestant Church members participated in a week long evangelistic campaign in Northern Thailand.

This started with a three-day seminar to prepare the volunteer evangelists for their special effort. The course consisted in Bible studies and lectures on the role of Bible distribution in evangelism. The participants received selections of biblical texts prepared by the Thai Bible Society to be used during their conversations with the people they were going to visit.

There is a growing interest on the part of Catholics in the distribution of the Scriptures in Thailand. A number of priests and nuns attended this seminar and became interested for the first time. One priest gave a public testimony to the fact that for the very first time in his life, the Bible had become a real living book to him.

There are one million Christians in Sri Lanka out of a population of fourteen million. Most of them are Roman Catholics; the others are Protestants. In that country, workshops are now organised in individual congregations to teach how Scriptures can be used in evangelism. These projects, organised by the Sri Lanka Bible Society, are approved by all the Churches on the island. There are three members of the distribution team, one of them a Roman Catholic brother who has dedicated his life to this work. All report that the Church leaders support this activity but that, in some cases, members of the various clergies do not yet understand the place that the Scriptures should and could have in their day to day evangelistic contacts.

The workshops, under the title "Reach Out to Your Neighbour", are a challenge to the members of each congregation to take home with them a parcel of Gospels and other well-chosen biblical texts in order to show them to their neighbours and to offer them in the course of a conversation. Half of the congregations who so participated in this project are Roman Catholic.

During the summer of 1979 four youth conferences were organised in Lebanon in order to teach and practice common witness through the distribution of suitable biblical texts in towns and villages. After a short training period, the eighty young men and women went out together to meet people who, in the words of a participant: "have been affected by the war ..., friends and families have been killed ..., this has left them feeling very empty. They appear to be looking for a new set of standards and values ...". Here is an extract from the report of a member of one of the conferences, Mary Swaidy:

"We were young people of different nationalities and backgrounds gathering at Ketchag, eager to serve the Lord with all our hearts. To many of us this conference was different from other conferences we had in the past. In a short time we were to put into practice what we had been taught. It was a very exciting experience. Although we faced some difficulties during distribution, we could still experience the joy of serving the Lord and share His blessings together. We were one in Christ, and it was difficult to know to which Church each one of us belonged."

3. *Common Witness in Brussels*

The Brussels inter-ecclesial committee meets to discuss the problems common to the Anglican, Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant parishes of the city. One of its tasks is to organise the week of prayer in January. In May, 1977, it decided to give all the worshippers an easy access to the texts proposed for the 1978 celebrations. The Belgian Bible Society prepared an illustrated booklet with one of the 3 passages proposed for each day. A short introduction and a question were helping the readers to see the relevance of the text.

This project has created a new interest in the common reading of the Bible and similar booklets have been produced in 1979 and 1980. It has also given a new dimension to the great gathering in the St. Michel Cathedral, which marks the close of the week. The fact that the booklets were printed bilingually, in Flemish and in French, was also witnessing to the desire of all the Churches to respect the tense linguistic situations in the city. Thus, in 1980, the Church authorities outside the town itself have joined in the project and monolingual texts have been used in the two distinct linguistic areas of the Brabant province.

Bible work has thus been the occasion of a common witness in more than one sense.

4. *Common Witness of Malagasy Children*

At the occasion of the "Year of the Child" all Malagasy children aged 6 to 12 years, whether Christians or non-Christians, whether Lutherans or Catholics, Quakers or Reformed, were invited to read the Bible and to make a picture illustrating the story of the texts they found most exciting. Children of 13 to 16 were also asked to illustrate one of several texts proposed to them from the Old and from the New Testament. This invitation was broadcast by radio and sent to all churches by circular letters.

Many pictures were sent in, but only 1,555 reached the jury before the closing date of 1 June. After prizes had been awarded to the winners, all the pictures were put on display in two rooms of the Tananarive headquarters of the Bible Society. There was not enough room to display them all and some had to be on show in folders so that everyone could see them.

The exhibition was formally opened on the 21st June, the Malagasy Bible Day, and a lady representing the Ministry for Population gave an opening address.

The ten winners and all children who had sent in entries were invited to attend the prize-giving at the public stadium. An orchestra and choirs from different churches took part in the service. The biggest church in Tananarive would not have been able to house them all. Thus, the children of the country gave a common witness to their parents and to the many visitors of that exhibition.

5. *Common Witness and Church Leaders in Latin America*

Latin America is 85% Roman Catholic. The other 15% of the population belong either to the Orthodox family or to the various Protestants and neo-Protestant groups. For all those churches, 1979 has become the year of the publication of the Spanish "Popular version of the Bible". This new common language Bible is also used by all Spanish speaking Christians in Latin America.

The Latin American Episcopal Council (CELAM) has recommended this new publication (containing, at its request, the Deuterocanonical books) "for the distribution of God's word in Latin America". In their recommendation the bishops stated:

"We hope that, by way of this new translation, the divine Word may continue to be spread rapidly and be received with honour in our continent for greater knowledge of the Lord Jesus, faithfulness of everyone to his name, and the perfect union of all Christians."

Individual Church leaders are aware of the importance of biblical work for the common witness of the Christian. Thus the Bishop of Mercedes, Uruguay, closed "Bible Expo 1978" with these words: "God has blessed us by being present in Mercedes through his living Word which communicates life. May the Holy Spirit grant us that these days of blessing last within all of us, translated in love for the Word of God". This exhibition brought together five different churches in witnessing to their fellow townspeople: Roman Catholics, Baptists, Pentecostals, Plymouth Brethren and Methodists.

On the occasion of an import permit to get Bibles into Cuba, the ecumenical council of that island set up a Scripture committee to encourage the use of the Bible and the Roman Catholic Archbishop said that he constantly uses the common language Spanish New Testament. He asked to have his name put down to receive one of the first copies of the common language Spanish Bibles which will come into his country.

There is no doubt that the encouragement given by Latin American Church leaders to common Bible work has resulted in a spectacular growth of common witness in this continent.

6. Conclusion

In the Pacific, in Asia and in Africa, in Europe or the Americas, Churches and Christians who have often used the Bible to witness against each other, are now working together to witness to Christ through translating, teaching, singing, praying and distributing the Bible. Bible translators of different Church traditions have told us that when they translate the Scriptures together they grow closer and understand each other better. What is true for the scholars is just as true for all members of the Church who want to join and communicate the biblical message to those around them. In trying to take the texts of the New and Old Testaments seriously and to communicate it in a relevant way, to those around them, they discover that their common witness brings them closer together.

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d) Common Witness through Theological Dialogue

CHURCHES IN JOINT WITNESS

An Experiment of the Catholic and Evangelical Churches in Westphalia/ Federal Republic of Germany

"We confess that we may and must believe.
We believe that we may and must confess."

These words stand at the beginning of the document "*Churches in joint Witness*", which was published in 1977 by the Archdiocese of Paderborn, the Diocese of Munster and the Evangelical Church of Westphalia and has since served to encourage and enable the members of the two churches to give a joint Christian witness at the various levels of ecclesial life.

The document had been preceded by joint efforts regarding individual doctrinal problems, which dealt primarily with controversial matters. The results found their expression in a text entitled "*Churches in Doctrinal Dialogue*", which was published in 1975. Based on this document, which in many respects is of particular interest for expert theologians, a start was then made with formulating aids for the joint witness of the largest possible number of fellow Christians and, as far as possible, to provide such joint witness in our own midst. In connection with this activity a parallel commission tackled the task of concretely formulating the possibilities and needs of joint action, eventually submitting its conclusions in a text entitled "*Churches in Joint Action*". All three documents were published in 1977 under the title *Churches on a Joint Road* (Luther-Verlag, Bielefeld/Butzon und Bercker-Verlag, Kevelaer). In the introduction, signed by the Catholic bishops and the Evangelical President as publishers of the volume, we find the following words: "On our personal responsibility and in keeping with the mission of the ministry handed down to us, we now publish the texts contained in this volume. We thus put them into the hands of the members of our communities, the pastors and all faithful, so that they may all become more conscious of their responsibility for the unity of the Church and strengthened in their endeavours for the unity of Christendom" (p. 6).

The official status of the proposed witness was stressed 'a priori' by entrusting the preparation of the text to members of the church governments: Vice-President Werner Danielsmeyer, Oberkirchenrat Otto Schmitz, Auxiliary Bishop Reinhard Lettmann, and the then Auxiliary Bishop Paul-Werner Scheele. This group met at regular intervals in secluded places. As a general rule, the two sides took turns in preparing the various paragraphs, which were then unanimously amended, usually after rather long discussions. *Concentration* on central truths of the faith was found to

be helpful, as also the decision that four specific perspectives were to be considered in each case. Quite apart from methodology, these latter should prove of fundamental importance also for other analogous projects.

A note of *confession* introduces each paragraph. It always begins with the words "We profess ...". In this way it is made clear that "here we are not concerned with mere expressions of opinion or contributions to a discussion, but rather with the decisive and mandatory acceptance of basic features of our life" (p. 85). These relatively succinct parts mark the basis and the summit of the joint witness, they make it concrete and at the same time are its express realization. A second section faces up to facts and questions, to the problems and postulates of our *contemporaries*. It is found time and time again that these facets are not met exclusively outside the Church; rather, Christians themselves are moved and moulded by them, and also enriched and challenged by them. This is the reason why Christian witness cannot but take account of them. This is done in a further (third) section. Each paragraph then concludes by naming the *requirements* that arise from the truth handed down to us and their implications in view of our present-day situation; they concern both doctrine and life, because *witness must be given in word and deed*.

In this way the document treats the following articles: Faith; The Triune God; God the Father, the Almighty, Creator of Heaven and Earth; God the Son – True God and True Man; God the Son, the Redeemer – Cross and Resurrection; God the Son, Head of the Church and Lord of the World; God the Holy Spirit; Man ; Justification and Sanctification; the Church; Hope.

It was found that the consciously assumed obligation always to consider the four perspectives mentioned above had a positive influence on the realization of our joint witness. It made us conscious of the fact that we were not concerned with either a theoretical discussion or an abstract teaching, but rather with the ever-to-be-renewed act of the unique confession that corresponds to the unique truth of Christ. In each and every phase, moreover, we clearly kept in mind that Christian witness has essentially to be given with a view to concrete addressees. It must not limit itself to a correct repetition of traditional formulas, but must rather transmit the *received truth in a living way*. Openness towards our fellow men, their possibilities and difficulties that one needs to this end proved, on the whole, to have a positive effect on our joint efforts. There were times when the examination of a present day problem helped us to rediscover the topicality of the message we are privileged to pass on. It will undoubtedly further the credibility of our statements if the addressees feel that the authors felt themselves to be subject to a rigorous discipline.

All the members of the group had the good fortune of experiencing how many blessings are associated with the joint efforts of bearing witness to Christ. They desire this selfsame experience for as many Christians as possible and therefore advise them not merely to concern themselves with the results reproduced in the document as individuals and "for themselves", but rather to try together to take the various steps that are found in the text. For the saying of our Lord "He who does what is true comes to the light" (*John 3,21*) clearly applies in this case.

Paul-Werner Scheele
Bishop of Wurzburg

e) Common witness in religious, education

"We came for a course but instead we've had an experience together", remarked one of the teachers; "we haven't just learned about teaching; we have been sharing ourselves". That was in Uganda in 1977, during the time of Amin.

Just the day before this meeting of teachers, Janani Luwum, the Anglican Archbishop of Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi and Boga-Zaire, had been arrested in Kampala. Tension was high and yet over 25 secondary school teachers arrived for the religious education course on two ecumenical programmes for secondary schools "Developing in Christ" and "Christian Living Today".

The five years of inter-church co-operation which had gone into the preparation of these programmes could be lost if the teachers were not adequately introduced to the new materials and had not sufficient time to ask questions and share views. Since denominational religious education had existed in many schools in the past, a common Christian syllabus was something new for most. But for probably all, the life-approach was very new, as they had not been trained this way in their own education, and perhaps taught Bible Knowledge in a rather academic way. These life-approach Bible-based programmes, however, emphasize that one can't speak of religion without speaking of the situations and needs of people. The programmes are designed to help young adults speak about their more significant experiences, to explore how these affect them personally and in their society, helping them to become aware of how God is speaking to them in the events of their lives, through their individual and community history, as Africans and as Christians.

As we greeted each other at the beginning of the workshop, there was surprise and joy that instead of being only a few participants, due to the tense circumstances, a greater number than originally expected had arrived, teachers of several Christian denominations. During the opening prayer, some of the teachers thanked God for the opportunity to meet because "at these times it is good to have a reason to come together and to share our faith". We were having lunch that first day when one of the cooks who had been listening to the radio in the kitchen rushed in to tell us: "Archbishop Janani Lum and others have been killed in an automobile accident. It has just been announced over the radio". There was stunned silence and then people in small groups started talking together and there was fear and new tension. One of the woman teachers, a Protestant, came to me (a Catholic Sister) and said: "I knew the Archbishop personally, he has been in my house, we are Christians, aren't we going to pray?" I thanked her and asked her to announce that we would

start our afternoon session with prayer for the deceased.

We began: "We are all upset and saddened by the news. Let us pray for Archbishop Janani Luwum and the others who had died in the car, for their families, and for ourselves, asking Jesus for that peace he promised which is not the peace the world gives but that deep unshakeable peace which comes from trusting God in all circumstances, and which no one can take from us". The woman who had known the Archbishop voiced for all of us the faith meaning of that event: "Let us not be discouraged but rather rejoice that our brother Janani has been raised up by the Lord. Because of his life and death we should not be afraid, but rather be filled with courage to be more committed to our own work as religious, education teachers. That is the kind of response he would want, or else his death is wasted for us. I pray that we might benefit from this workshop together with even greater interest and participation now, so that we can understand more clearly how God is speaking to us in our lives". Her courageous words brought hope; no participant missed the next two days of working together.

The life-themes which we were exploring as teachers had emerged during a three-years survey of the concerns and issues which young people in Eastern Africa wanted to understand more deeply. These included such questions as: How can one feel 'at home' in these rapidly changing times? What does loyalty demand? What does it mean to search for justice? How do our cultures help us to understand the meaning of life? When we Christians share our experience together, we are exploring how God is revealing Himself to us in our lives; we seek to judge our experience in the light of the Scriptures and so to give a meaningful response. To do this with teachers in their training sessions means we are not only talking about a programme but about ourselves.

Our teachers' courses on "Developing in Christ" and "Christian Living Today" enabled common witness to take place at that meeting in Uganda in 1977. In 1980 in Africa Pope John Paul II spoke specially about this kind of witness and collaboration, and his words could well be a summary of what we experienced together then: "... the credibility of the Gospel message and of Christ himself is linked to Christian unity ... it is possible for us to collaborate frequently in the cause of the Gospel... let us find ways of engaging in acts of common witness, be it joint Bible work in promoting human rights and meeting human needs, in theological dialogue, in praying together when opportunity allows".

I have been involved in probably more than 200 courses for many thousands of teachers, pastors and parents in 20 African countries during the past eleven years, helping people to use the ecumenical programmes "Developing in Christ" and "Christian Living Today". Each course has enabled people to come together in their common Christian task of proclaiming the Gospel. One of our posters says: "Come with me; I call you friends". That unity in Christ must be a major aim of all Christian religious education programmes. Our teacher-training courses try to help teachers experience that fellowship, rather than just talk about it. Some of the comments from the teachers help us to realize that this has been happening and that being together to share our faith has made a difference in people's lives. For when insights are shared a new awareness and openness can result, and faith can be deepened. The following teachers' responses speak for themselves:

- "We came to be introduced to new syllabuses and materials, yet beyond that we have been introduced to a way of life and relationships".
- "These books are about ourselves! They help us to respect ourselves and our culture when many people don't do this".
- In Southern Africa a white woman teacher came to me one evening and wept: "I'm so grateful", she said. I asked why. "If you only knew the pictures we are given about independent black Africa and the terrible things that go on there. But as I learn more about the people through this programme, I don't believe it any longer. It has opened my eyes and gives me hope for the future".
- "Sometimes you feel that you have gained from a conference; you know it is relevant, but you don't know how to communicate this to others. We now have tools we need, with these books, so we can't stay still and feel that way. I have been changed. I want to teach religious education now and I was afraid of doing this before".
- "I never thought we could share the fellowship we have experienced during this workshop. You Catholics have come a long way. My attitude to Catholics has changed as a result of this time spent together".
- "Because these programmes aim to teach people to appreciate how God speaks in the lies of all people, I, as a Muslim, welcome the attitudes of respect and acceptance which are being formed. In this way we can contribute much to each other".

There has been widespread appreciation for the possibilities opened up by the new ecumenical Religious Education programmes. Many new links and relationships have been established, locally, nationally and even among countries in Africa. The groups we have worked with have often experienced a new sense of concern and outreach towards other countries of Africa, as their prayers together have so often reflected.

I especially experienced what common Christian witness can mean when I worked in 1980 with Audrey Greenshields, an Anglican, and Director of the Council for Christian Education in Zimbabwe, which represents 14 Christian Churches including the Catholic Church. Audrey and I served as the nucleus of a mobile inter-church training team travelling to several countries of Southern Africa. As fellowship was growing between us, our opening out to each other seemed to encourage openness in the groups we worked with. Audrey and I shared our life together at a depth we had not expected, and this acceptance of each other and working together "in heart and spirit" was perhaps conveyed to the groups more by the way we were present together than by any particular words spoken. People commented on how

much this meant to them and how it contributed to the ecumenical spirit which grew during the courses. This common task of proclaiming the Word of God led us to prayer together as we sought to be guided by God's Spirit so that His Word could truly be a living word about our lives, touching us where we were. Paul expressed what the experience of this close cooperation and searching together meant for him, in the words "All of you are one in union with Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3 :28). Audrey and I, and the many groups we worked with came to understand that Christian calling more clearly than before.

Pope John Paul II, during his visit to Kenya in May 1980, said that Christian divisions are a scandal to the world, especially to the young churches in mission lands, and that truly the credibility of the Gospel message and of Christ himself is linked to Christian unity. I consider that the many training courses given to teachers throughout Africa, and the ecumenical "Developing in Christ" and "Christian Living Today" programmes which are being studied by thousands of students, play an important part in helping to reduce this scandal in Africa.

Sister Josephine Lucker M.M.

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