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UNITY IN DIVERSITY : THE CHRISTIAN MODEL OF UNITY

According to Alfred Loisy, the French Catholic Modernist theologian, Jesus preached the coming of the Kingdom of God, but what came into existence was the Church. Loisy questioned the absolute and unchangable character of the Church, its structures and dogmas, and argued that everything in the Church must give way to the Kingdom of God. There seems to be some truth in his statement. The Jesus' Movement which was meant to be the harbinger and servant of the Kingdom of God, became in the course of history one among the many religions in whose name wars and crusades were waged, people were converted by force, conscientious objectors were persecuted and burned at the stake, and walls separating man from man were erected. Not only that, Christianity itself became gradually divided into various Churches, denominations and sects followed by mutual condemnations and excommunications. All the same, Christianity claims to be the sign or sacrament and instrument of the unity of all humankind: "By her relationship with Christ, the Church is a kind of sacrament or sign of intimate union with God, and of the unity of all mankind.¹ Does this not amount to a contradiction and a grossly false statement? Has the Church's claim to be a force and instrument of unity any credibility? In the following pages we shall investigate the Church's original vision and practice of unity, the forces which brought about the historical divisions in the Church and the present search of the Churches, for a model of unity.

I

The Original Vision of Christian Unity

It will be a gross mistake to conceive that the earliest Church was a highly centralized and institutionalized religious community headed by Peter and supervised by his assistants, the other apostles. The early Christian communities were not homogeneous or uniform but diverse with different forms of ministries, different patterns of organization, different formulations

1. Vatican II: *Lumen Gentium*, no. 1.

and articulations of faith and different ways of worship arising from their different historical, cultural and religious contexts. They were only very loosely linked with each other, and conflicts and tensions were also not entirely absent between the different local Churches. But the early Christians were fully conscious that the Church is one — one fellowship, the communion of all the local Churches — that they all share in the same faith in Jesus Christ in whom they are incorporated into one Body. We shall see now more details of this 'unity in diversity.'

As Jesus was a Jew and he limited his preaching and ministry to Palestine, centred around Jerusalem and Galilee, naturally his apostles and the first disciples were drawn from Judaism. With the experience of the Crucified and Risen Lord, and that of the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost, the apostles became fully conscious of their missionary mandate and began to preach about Jesus of Nazareth, and many who listened to them believed and thus the Church was born in Jerusalem. The first Christian community was thus typically Jewish in all aspects: in beliefs, rituals, lifestyle and community organization. The Old Testament and the entire Jewish tradition was theirs, plus the faith in Jesus in whom they saw the Messiah as promised in their own tradition. They continued to go to the Jewish temple and participated in the Jewish prayers, although they had their own gatherings in various houses for the Breaking of the Bread in remembrance of Jesus, where the apostles and disciples of Jesus shared with others their experience of Jesus and interpreted their Scriptures (Old Testament) in a new way. Gradually they began to organize themselves as separate synagogue communities but within the Jewish faith and not outside of it; for they did not consider themselves a separate religion. Naturally they followed the Jewish pattern of the ministry of "elders" and the council of elders.

From Jerusalem and its environs, Christianity gradually spread to Antioch (it was there the believers were first called "Christians"), and from Antioch to the 'gentile world' of Asia Minor, Greece and Rome. Among the first Christians there were some Hellenists, for example, Stephen and others² who were Jews but culturally more influenced by the Hellenistic (Greek) world. They might be said to be the forerunners of the liberal Christianity. They played a major role in bringing Christianity to Samaria, Antioch and to the so-called 'gentile world'. Of course, we do not forget

2. *Acts of the Apostles*, Chapter 6.

here the leadership of Peter and Paul who were the champions in bringing Christianity to the Hellenistic and Roman worlds. The emergence of a Hellenistic and Gentile Christianity *vis-à-vis* the Jewish Christianity triggered a host of tensions and conflicts among the different Christian communities. *The Acts of the Apostles* presents the story of the struggles of these new "missionary Churches" to break away from the Jewish traditions and patterns of the Mother Church in Jerusalem. The Church in Jerusalem, the Jewish Church, the Mother Church, could not at first envisage a Hellenistic or Gentile Church quite different from its own patterns and life-style. They perhaps thought that Christianity, as it was a new development in Judaism, was meant only for Jews and those converted to Judaism. For them to be a Christian implied the acceptance of the whole of the Old Testament and all the Jewish traditions and practices including the rite of circumcision. But this narrow view held by many Jewish Christians was challenged by the Hellenistic and 'gentile Christians' and the Council of Jerusalem supported them and ruled that the Jewish Law and traditions should not be imposed on the new 'gentile Christians'.³ What is worth noting here is that the Jewish Christian practice of circumcision and the other prescriptions of the Mosaic Law were not condemned, but they were not made a universal law either, i.e. a diversity in Christian life-style and practice was fully recognized and established by the First Ecumenical Council at Jerusalem.

Diversity of the different local Churches was thus an essential part of the original vision of Christianity. However, we do not have all the details of these diversities of the early Christian communities. But the New Testament books definitely witness to different types of Christianity existing side by side with mutual recognition and acceptance though not altogether free from conflicts, tensions and controversies.⁴ We have already indicated two different types in the earliest Christianity, Jewish and Hellenistic, based on their different cultural and religious backgrounds. Various early Christian Gnostic groups could be located within the Hellenistic type though some of these Gnostic Christian groups later on became heretical and broke away from the Church. There were also other types of Churches like the Apocalyptic, Charismatic, and what is called 'Catholic.' In the history of Israel the New Testament times is known as the Apocalyptic period feature of which the characteristic was the belief that they stood at the close of

3. *Acts of the Apostles*, Chapter 15.

4. James D. G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: An Inquiry into the Character of Earliest Christianity*, (London: SCM, 1977).

history in 'the last days' when Yahweh would establish the final Messianic Kingdom. Some of the Christian communities shared this apocalyptic hope and fervently waited for the immediate Second Coming (*parousia*) of Christ (*Thessalonians I & II*; *MK*, chapter 13 etc.). Some of the early Pauline communities were dominantly charismatic in-as-much as they were led and guided by these who manifested the gifts of the Spirit and not by those whom the apostles invested with authority through an act of the imposition of hands. On the other hand, the Christian communities as seen in the Pastoral Letters were typically 'Catholic' in the sense that they were more institutionalized and organized with definite patterns of episiscopal ministry and almost fixed 'apostolic traditions.'

However, all these different types of the early Churches had a fundamental unity, namely, their faith in Jesus Christ as God and Saviour. All of them maintained the unity between the Christ crucified and the Christ exalted. This central Christological faith was the test of orthodoxy, however different may be the formulations of this confession, such as, Messiah, Lord (*Kyrios*), Son of God, Son of Man etc. But the moment this central christological faith was challenged or diluted some of these types of Christian communities inevitably became heretical as in the case of the *Ebionites* (Jewish Christians who denied the full divinity of Christ and held an 'adoptionist' Christology) and the *Gnostics* (Hellenistic Christians who denied the full humanity of Christ and held a 'docetist' Christology).

II

Historical Divisions in Christianity

The original Christian vision of unity in diversity was lost to a great extent in the course of the Church's growth and development and, in fact, the historical divisions in the Church came almost as a result of insistence on uniformity and the tendency to condemn all diversity in doctrinal and theological formulations. Ever since the identification of the Church with the Roman Empire in the 4th century, uniformity of all the local Churches within the Empire in matters relating to doctrines, structures and organization was insisted on as it was felt necessary for the political stability of the Empire. All new ideas, developments and innovations were frowned upon. The result: tragic divisions in Christianity.

No living religion can be put into strait jackets. Religions are not closed systems of beliefs and practices that "exist up in the sky somewhere elaborated, finished and static, they exist in men's hearts."⁵ Being in history and built up on the current experience every religious tradition grows, develops and expresses itself in ever new interpretations and elaborations of faith, beliefs and practices. If this natural process of growth is suppressed the religious tradition soon become static, petrified and gradually dies out. Alternatively, those who stand for progress and change will opt out and found a new denomination, if not an entirely new religion as it happened in the case of Sikhism.

A religion gives rise to new denominations very often when it encounters new situations, new cultures and new peoples. If a religion born in a particular culture and among a certain people is to become universal by encountering other cultures and peoples, it has to undergo a process of transformation or incarnation in to the latter. It calls for the diversification and branching out of one religious tradition into a number of new possible traditions and systems resulting often in new denominations. Inevitably there will be tensions and conflicts between the old tradition and the new traditions. The old tradition often fails to recognize the same faith in the new traditions with the tragic consequence of condemnation, excommunication and division. All these factors must be taken into consideration for an understanding and explanation of the historical divisions in Christianity.

Ever since the beginning of the Church its unity was threatened time and again by various heresies and schisms, many of which gradually disappeared from the scene while some continued to exist and brought almost lasting divisions in the Church. The 5th century is well-known in the history of the Church for the *Trinitarian and Christological controversies* which rocked the Churches throughout the East. The confession of the Lordship of Christ or his divinity appeared to be a threat to the staunch monotheism of Judaism. The Christian answer to this dilemma was the doctrine of the Trinity – One Godhead in Three Persons, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and Jesus Christ was understood to be the Son, the Second person of the Trinity. But how could Christ be both God and man, divine and human at the same time? The traditional answer was that Christ is fully God and fully man, that He has two natures, human and divine, subsisting in one and

5. M. Eliade and J. Kitogawa (eds.), *The History of Religions: Essays in Methodology* (Chicago: University Chicago Press, 1959), p. 34.

the same person. These Trinitarian and Christological discussions and controversies were mainly confined to the two rival schools of *Alexandria and Antioch* that had quite different cultural backgrounds and approaches. In Christology the Alexandrians stressed the divinity of Christ whereas the Antiocheans emphasised His humanity. *Nestorius* of the Antiochean school became Patriarch of Constantinople in 428 and the Alexandrians suspected his orthodoxy and under the leadership of Bishop Cyril they accused him of heresy. He was alleged that he taught that in Christ there existed two natures and two persons, divine and human, disrupting the unity in the personality of Jesus, and making Blessed Virgin Mary the 'Mother of Jesus, and of the 'Mother of God'. Nestorius was condemned at the Council of Ephesus in 431, and the East-Syrian Church or the Persian Church which gave asylum to the Nestorian party became separated from the other Churches. Thus the so-called *Nestorian Churches* were the first major division in the East.

Closely related to this controversy was the origin of the so-called *Monophysite Churches*. The Churches which condemned Nestorius and his followers gradually went to the other extreme. Eutyches the Abbot was their spokesman and he is alleged to have taught that in Christ there existed only one nature, *monophysis*, that the human nature was swallowed up by the divine, just 'as a drop of honey which falls into the sea, dissolves in it'. Eutyches claimed that he was only following the teaching of Cyril of Alexandria. And, in fact, the successor of Cyril, Patriarch Dioscorus of Alexandria, supported Eutyches. The Council of Chalcedon in 451 condemned this monophysite doctrine and defined that "in Christ two natures without confusion and division are united in one person or *hypostasis*." This Chalcedonian doctrinal formulation was rejected by the so-called Monophysite groups of Churches such as, the Egyptian or Coptic Church, the Ethiopian Church, the Armenian Church and the West-Syrian Jacobite Church or the Antiochean Church. Thus Second major division in the Church, and once again it was in the East.

The third major division, and perhaps the most tragic one, was the *separation of Eastern and Western Christianity* in 1054. In the final analysis the reasons for this division were more political than doctrinal. Ever since the foundation of the city of Constantinople as the "new Rome" and the divisions of the Roman Empire into East and West, political rivalry between Rome and Constantinople was fermenting. Differences in language, culture, liturgy and theology gradually widened the gulf between East and West.

This increasing polarization showed itself in the 9th century in the so-called doctrinal controversy of the *filioque*. The Western interpolation of *filioque* (= and from the Son) in the Nicene Creed – the addition in the article that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father *and the Son* – was bitterly attacked by Photius, the Patriarch of Constantinople and others in the East as doctrinally heretical because it would imply that there are two sources (The Father alone as the single unique source was the orthodoxy) in the Holy Trinity. The actual break between the East and West came in 1054 when the chief Papal delegate Cardinal Humbert laid on the altar of the St. Sophia Cathedral in Constantinople the Papal Bull excommunicating the Patriarch of Constantinople, Michael Cerularius, for his heretical ideas and practices. The Patriarch in turn excommunicated the Papal delegates. These unfortunate events together with the atrocities of the crusaders who sacked the city of Constantinople and desecrated the Cathedral perpetuated the division between the Eastern Orthodox and the Western Roman Catholic Churches. The Eastern Orthodoxy today consists of several independent Patriarchates such as Istanbul, Russia, Jerusalem and their allies.

The fourth major division in the Church happened in the 16th century, and this time within the Western Catholicism as a consequence of the *Protestant Reformation* led by Martin Luther, John Calvin, Ulrich Zwingli and several others. The Reformers challenged some of the doctrines and practices of the medieval Church, such as, the doctrine of Indulgence, the doctrine and system of the Sacraments, which was looked upon as magical, and the almost dictatorial exercise of the Papal and Episcopal authority. They emphasized, on the other hand, religious freedom, personal experience, absolute sovereignty of God, supremacy of the Word of God in the Sacred Scriptures and democratic structures of authority. None of these Reformers wanted a schism in the Church; what they clamoured for was a thorough reform in the whole Church both in the head and members.' But because of the rejection of the demands of the Reformers and the total condemnation of their views by the official Roman Church they had to break away from the Church and found new ecclesial communities. Moreover, the Reformation Period was marked by the Spirit of nationalism all over Europe and many of the European princes supported the Reformers and consequently several national and local Churches declared allegiance to the Reformers. The final result of the Reformation was not the emergence of one big separated Protestant Church, but several Protestant Churches who disagreed and separated among themselves on matters of "faith and order."

The picture of the Protestant Churches today is very complex. They include numerous denominations, conservatives as well as progressives, fundamentalists as well as radicals. There are the traditional Churches like the Lutherans, Reformed or Presbyterians (after the calvinist model) and the Anglicans, and others born out of further revivals like the Congregationalists, Baptists, Methodists, Quakers Brethren, the Disciples, the Pentecostals and so on. There are also some united Churches, which emerged out of the contemporary ecumenical movement by the merging together of many Protestant groups, like the Church of South India, the Church of North India etc. This wide spectrum of the Protestant Churches and the divisions among themselves makes the task of unity all the more difficult.

III

Forces at Work in the Divisions of the Church

The brief outline of the divisions in the history of Christianity given above has already indicated the various historical factors that led to mutual condemnations and separations. Here we should like to go deeper into the root causes for the divisions and uncover the layers one by one identifying the different forces at work in the various divisions in the Church. We will identify five important areas of forces or factors that underlie the various divisions: 1. Heretical doctrines, 2. Theological differences, 3. Social and cultural factors, 4. Political forces, 5. Forces of human sin.

1. *Heretical Doctrines*: Apparently the most obvious force or factor behind the divisions and separations in the history of the Church was heresy or deviation from the orthodox doctrines and teachings. In all the major differences and divisions among the Church personalities, groups and Churches were condemned or excommunicated because of unorthodox doctrinal teachings. Nestorians and Monophysites were excommunicated on the charge that they had deviated from the orthodox Christology which safeguarded the fulness of the humanity and divinity of Jesus Christ, the unity as well as the distinction of the human and divine natures in Christ. Nestorianism, on the one hand, destroyed the unity of the person of Christ, positing two 'persons' in Christ, the human and divine persons. Monophysitism, on the other, in effect denied the human nature of Christ, that the human nature was absorbed in the immensity of the divine nature. Doctrinal

issues were also involved in the separation of the Eastern and Western Christianities. They seemed to differ on the doctrine of the procession of the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Holy Trinity, on the doctrine of the Roman primacy and so on. The Reformation too was a doctrinal movement which was condemned by the Roman Church as heretical. Luther's doctrine of 'justification by faith alone,' and his doctrine of the Church and its ministry were rejected as unorthodox.

"Was Nestorius really a Nestorian?" Today theologians and historians ask this and similar questions about Luther and the Reformers. And the answers seem to be invariably in the negative. Although the Churches are said to be divided on account of doctrinal differences, today historians find it very difficult to trace any heresies in Nestorius, Eutyches, Martin Luther and others. Often their teachings were reported by their enemies and naturally they were exaggerated and quoted out of context. In all fairness the doctrines and teachings of a person or church should be taken in their totality and in their particular historical context. When taken in the isolation they may appear to be one-sided and heretical. Monophysitism can be understood only in the historical context of Nestorianism and *vice versa*. Nestorius in his autobiography gives the reasons for his controversy with Cyril of Alexandria. He saw in Cyrils' doctrine of the 'one nature of the incarnate Logos' the 'Docetic and Manichaeistic evaporation of Christ's human nature'. So he wanted to emphasize the integrity of each of the two natures in Christ. He says that when he opposed calling Mary *Theotokos* (Mother of God) he did not mean to deny the Godhead of Christ, but that he wanted to emphasize that Christ had been born of Mary as a genuine human being with body and soul. Nestorius also confessed that his teachings were not different from that of Pope Leo I and Patriarch Flavian of Constantinople.⁶ After all, the formal Nestorian confession of 486 was little different from the definition of the Council of Chalcedon.⁷ With regard to the Greek schism it must be noted that in the Reunion Council of Florence (1438) both Easterners and Westerners agreed that there were no real doctrinal differences between them. It was just a case of formulating the same doctrine different ways. Similarly at the conference of Ratisbon in 1541 held for effecting a reconciliation between Catholics and Protestants, both parties agreed upon the 'doctrine of justification by faith' which was supposed to be the bone of contention.

6. Bihlmeyer-Tüchle, *Church History*, Vol. I (Maryland: The Newman Press, 1958), pp. 273-74.

7. Barry Till, *The Churches' Search for Unity*, (Penguin Books, 1972), p. 102.

Historically the Churches were said to be divided on doctrinal issues. But it seems to be very difficult to prove today by objective historical studies that the divided or separated Churches were really heretical: The general conclusion would be that the Churches were in fact divided not so much on doctrinal issues but more on factors of a non-doctrinal nature. The forces behind most of the divisions were more theological than doctrinal.

2. *Theological Differences*: Today many of the scholars and historians would agree that in the Nestorian and Monophysite divisions in the Church the crux of the issue was not much doctrinal as theological. The controversies and definitions at Ephesus and Chalcedon were centred on the basic Christological doctrine that Jesus Christ is "God-Man." Nestorius, Cyril, Eutyches and others were trying to explain this Christological mystery and dogma in philosophical terms and categories prevalent in their own circles. As mentioned above the Alexandrian School of theology stressed the divinity of Christ whereas the Antiochean School emphasized the humanity of Christ. Both approaches had their merits and demerits. But the Church of the 5th century could not fully contain these theological differences, as uniformity in formulations was its primary concern. So the early councils of Ephesus and Chalcedon had to ally itself with one theological School or another. Ephesus meant victory for the Alexandrian School, whereas at Chalcedon the Antiochan School got the upper hand.

Differences in theological thinking and Christian life-style, in fact, played the dominant role also in the division between the Eastern and Western Churches. The Easterners were not at home with the speculative, rational and scholastic theology of the West. Eastern theology was more Biblical, patristic, poetic and apophatic. Eastern thinking was holistic and unitarian maintaining the unity of human and divine, Church and State, religion and politics, whereas the western thought-pattern was dualistic separating human and divine, secular and sacred, Church and State. So the whole theological ethos of the East and West were quite different. After all, Greek and Latin were two totally different languages. expressing two different mental horizons and in that context theological confusion and misunderstanding was inevitable to some extent.

The Protestant Reformation too was the result of a Theological shift, a break with the medieval scholastic theology and the option for a new Theology. In 1517 just before the emergence of the Reformation Martin Luther wrote as follows: "My theology, which is St Augustine's is getting on, and

is dominant in the university. God has done it. Aristotle is going down hill and perhaps he will go all the way down to hell . . . I am quite sure that the Church will never be reformed unless we get rid of canon law, scholastic theology, philosophy and logic as they are studied today, and put something else in their place⁸." Luther and the Reformers, in fact, followed the Nominalistic philosophy and theology of William Ockham (1290-1349) and others which was known as the *via moderna* and they rejected what was called the *via antiqua* of Thomas Aquinas. For Aquinas natural and super-natural are related. Supernatural is the perfection of the natural. But for Ockham and the Reformers no bridge is provided between the natural and the super-natural. It is impossible to know God or reach God through nature and reason. We can know God only when God reveals Himself to man. Hence the Reformation dictums—*Sola gratia*, *Sola fide*, *Sola scriptura* (grace alone, faith alone, scripture alone).

So we are inclined to believe that differences in theological thinking and methods, differences in theologizing and theological systems were at the root of almost all the divisions and separations in the Church. However, we should search still further for the roots of these theological differences or theological pluralism. It seems that social, cultural, linguistic, racial, psychological, economic, political and similar other differences are, in fact, at the root of theological differences.

3. *Social and Cultural Factors*: Socio-cultural, economic and political factors which are divisive in the Church are often called 'non-theological factors.' But here our understanding of theology is defective. Theology is not universal, abstract and perennial since theologizing is not done in a vacuum. The Starting point of theology is one's own social, cultural and political, context, and socio-cultural factors are the matrix of theologizing. Emile Durkheim, Max Weber and others in Sociology of Religion have clearly established the close relationship between religion and society, the dependence of religious beliefs, doctrines and practices on the social structures and cultural horizons. Consequently a change in social structures and cultural horizons will inevitably affect the religious beliefs, doctrines and practices. Hence it follows that doctrinal and theological differences have their deeper roots in the socio-cultural differences.

8. Quoted by Owen Chadwick in *The Reformation* (Pelican History of the Church, Vol. III, p. 46).

An impartial and objective study of the history of the Church will show that the Churches were divided and separated more often because of social, cultural and political forces. It is admitted by all that the socio-cultural, linguistic and racial differences between Alexandria and Antioch, between Rome and Constantinople played the major role in the historical divisions in the Church. We cannot elaborate this point here. We want to add and emphasize that the same was the case as regards the Protestant Reformation. The Reformation had as its background the collapse of the Roman civilization, the decadence of the Latin language and literature and the emergence of a new society, culture and new languages together with an intellectual Renaissance, 'thinking in a new fashion, untrammelled by the customary channels and conceptions of thought,' a rational, critical examination of everything mundane and supramundane. It was a new spirit of humanism, freedom, democracy, scientific research and nationalism which clashed with the Roman supremacy and the age old traditions, customs and theological thought-patterns of the Roman Church. "To be a Roman Catholic or Protestant did not mean simply to have a different faith, but also to have a different territory, different politics, different culture, even different economic principles."⁹ It is very significant to note that when the Reformation became settled that part of Europe which had been thoroughly Romanized and spoke Romance languages stayed mostly Catholic and the other part, Teutonic, Scandinavian, Anglo-Saxon North which was remote from the Roman civilization went Protestant.

In general it could be said that the ramifications and divisions in Christianity was the result of its encounter with the different cultural worlds. The earliest divisions on the basis of the Trinitarian and Christological controversies were the consequence of the meeting of the Hebrew and Greek cultural worlds. The separation of the Orthodoxy and Roman Churches was the tragic result of a violent encounter between the Greek and Roman worlds. Similarly, as mentioned above, the division into Catholic and Protestant happened in the encounter between the Roman and Germanic cultural worlds. Such ramifications and diversifications of the Church are inevitable because of socio-cultural differences, whereas separations and breaking of communion on account of these is tragic as well as scandalous.

4. *Political Forces*: The Political forces behind the historical divisions in the Church must be specifically pointed out although they cannot be strictly

9. Skydsgaard, *One in Christ*, (Philadelphia : Muhlenberg Press, 1957), p. 42.

separated from the social and cultural factors. Almost all the divisions in the Church under the Roman Empire occurred as the aftermath of the attempt of the emperors to stabilize and unify their Empire by suppressing religious disputes and dissensions. All the early ecumenical councils were convened, controlled and often dictated by the emperors, and several of their decrees and decisions were brought with political motivations and gains. Decisions policies and orthodoxy itself often changed and sometimes reversed depending on the moods and minds of the emperors and as different personalities succeeded to the throne. To win a theological and religious controversy it was very necessary to secure the support of the emperor and of his court.

The separation of the so-called Nestorian Church of Persia was a political necessity rather than the consequence of a heresy. The Roman Empire was a menace to the Persian State, and in Persia Christians were often looked upon with suspicion and persecuted as a source of danger to the National Unity, as 'potential Roman fifth column'. The Church in Persia therefore, had to be strongly nationalistic and independent for its own survival and thus had to break away from Constantinople.

Although monophysitism was condemned by the Council of Chalcedon, it was still maintained in Palestine, Egypt and Syria because the emperors at Constantinople were sympathetic to the Monophysites. And it was simply to appease the Monophysites and thus to restore the threatened unity of the Empire that emperor Justinian condemned posthumously the three leaders of the Antiochean School—Theodore of Mopsuestia, Theodoret of Cyrus and Ibas of Edessa – known in history as "Three-chapter controversy". When Pope Vigilius opposed it, Justinian held a General Council at Constantinople in 553 and had the Pope excommunicated.

The separation between the Western Roman Church and Eastern Orthodox Church was altogether a political event. It was the separation of two Empires rather than two Churches. Rome's dependence upon the new and rising power of the Frankish kings and the climax of the coronation of Charles the Great by Pope Leo III in 800 as the 'Holy Roman Emperor' was actually the primary factor for the widening gulf between Rome and Constantinople. The doctrinal and theological disputes such as "filioque" flared up in this context of historical tensions and conflicts and as a reaction to the ecclesial supremacy of Rome, and the mutual excommunication of 1054 was only the final tragic sequel.

The political force behind the Reformation cannot be forgotten either. The success of the Reformation owed entirely to the support given to it by the German Princes and to the dominant Spirit of Nationalism in the Europe of the 16th century. The political disunity and divisions of Europe preceded the religious divisions of the Reformation. Thus political forces can be clearly identified in all the major divisions in the history of the Church.

5. *Forces of Human Sin* : Last but not least, for a comprehensive explanation for the divisions in the Church we have to take into account the forces of sin both among individuals and communities. All divisions and separations in the Church were born in the womb of human sin, sin against the unity of the Body of Christ, sin on both sides, on the part of those who broke away from the Church and on the part of those who excommunicated them. Behind these divisions lie the sin of human pride, selfishness, self-sufficiency, arrogance, rebellion against lawful authority, abuse of authority, high-handedness of those in authority, personal rivalries, mutual contempt and so on.

Rivalry between the Alexandrian and Antiochean Schools, between Cyril and Nestorius, between Rome and Constantinople, between Rome and the new European Nations played a very decisive role in the historical divisions in the Church. Had Cyril and Nestorius been more patient to understand each other and more soft spoken, charitable and forgiving, perhaps, the Nestorian and subsequent Monophysite divisions would not have occurred. If Cardinal Humbert, the chief of the Roman delegation to Constantinople in 1054 had not been so arrogant and the Patriarch Michael Cerularius not so stubborn, the East-West division could have been very well avoided. The Reformation was an honest appeal and a sincere call for the reform of the Catholic Church which had become very corrupt 'both in head and members'. If the authorities of the Roman Church had not been so autocratic and arrogant, with closed minds quick in dismissing the views and challenges of the Reformers, perhaps, the unity of the medieval Church could have been safeguarded. We do not want to elaborate this point any further.

From the above discussions of the brief history of the divisions in Christianity and the analysis of the various forces behind them the following conclusions may be drawn: (a) Every living religion is in continuous dialogue with its own inherited tradition *vis-à-vis* contemporary experience

and the result is a continuous process of transformation. In this process of development or growth, new understandings, interpretations and elaborations of its doctrines, beliefs and practices will emerge. Naturally this will engender tensions, conflicts, and controversies between progressives and conservatives and may lead to new factions, divisions and denominations within every religious tradition. Refusal and unwillingness to reform according to the times will inevitably lead to divisions and separations. Enlightened groups will be forced to make an exodus and form different communities or systems. (b) Every religion born in a particular culture and people when it encounters other cultures and peoples, has to undergo some transformation and inculturation, and subsequently ramifications and diversifications of the religious tradition will be inevitable. Naturally it may lead to tensions and conflicts, and in the event of lack of mutual acceptance and recognition new religious denominations will be born. (c) Religious pluralism, denominational pluralism, doctrinal pluralism and theological pluralism are the order of the day and they seem to be the irreversible pattern of the future. So any religion which is unable or unwilling to accommodate within itself a legitimate diversity will inevitably end up in divisions, factions and separations. So 'unity in diversity' is the only acceptable model both for the various living religions and for the different denominations of the same religion, as also for the different Churches.

The different Christian Churches that had enjoyed separate, independent existences for centuries were drawn together by the contemporary Ecumenical Movement and they have in fact rediscovered their original model of unity, 'unity in diversity'. And this model, 'unity in diversity' may be taken up by all religions in their intra-religious as well as inter-religious dialogue.

IV

The Churches' Rediscovery of 'Unity in Diversity'

The Evangelical Awakening of the 19th century which cut across all the Churches, and the subsequent missionary movements which sent missionaries to all over the world may be said to mark the birth of the contemporary Ecumenical Movement among the Christian Churches. When the missionaries from the divided Churches met together in foreign mission lands, they began to realize that they have a fundamental unity and that the divisions

among them are a scandal to the non-Christians and a serious obstacle to the proclamation of the Gospel. Besides, the native Christians in the Mission countries realized that the divisions in Christianity and their various brands imported by the missionaries had no meaning for them in their lands. The people in the mission lands refused to be divided in the name of Christ. Thus the plea for one united Church and the search for the rediscovery of the visible unity of the Churches came first from the mission field. The Churches thus formed an ecumenical forum for the common proclamation of the Gospel which became later (1921) the *International Missionary Council* (IMC), which was meant "to stimulate thinking and investigation on questions related to the mission, to help co-ordinate the activities of the national missionary organizations and Christian councils of the different countries and bring out united action."¹⁰

The common proclamation of the Gospel required the visible unity of the Churches and the latter meant that the Churches should once again squarely face the traditional doctrinal and theological differences among them, settle their disputes, heal the divisions and reestablish mutual communion. For this specific objective the Churches started another branch of the ecumenical movement known as *Faith and Order* (its preliminary meeting was held at Geneva in 1929) which implied that unity requires a consensus in matters of faith and order of the Church. There were others who believed that the need of the hour was not to settle the internal disputes among the Churches but to witness together as Christians in the world, to promote fellowship and peace among the nations torn apart by war and conflicts and to establish justice and an equitable order in society on the basis of the Christian principles of truth, justice and love. And for this purpose they started a third wing of the ecumenical movement called *Life and Work* with its first world conference at Stockholm in 1925. The pioneers of the Ecumenical Movement gradually realized that the concerns of these three movements – "International Missionary Council," "Faith and Order," "Life and Work" – should be related and co-ordinated in order to serve better the cause of Christian unity. And the result was the formation of the *World Council of Churches* (1948) under which most of the Ecumenical Movements are housed today. Even the Roman Catholic Church, which is not officially a member of the World Council of Churches, has been drawn

10. *Constitution of the IMC*, see, David P. Gaines, *The World Council of Churches: A Study of its Background and History*, (Petersborough: The Richard R. Smith Co., 1966), p. 23.

into the Ecumenical Movement today with the Second Vatican Council and thus the Churches have been searching together the way to unity.

When the Churches met together for the first time after centuries of separation they realized that what they urgently needed was genuine mutual understanding as a "first step" towards unity. Inherited prejudices, animosities, rivalries and mutual suspicion among the churches had to give way to sincere openness and real mutual understanding. The method used by the ecumenical conferences and dialogues at this primary stage was the "comparative method."¹¹ The beginnings of unity had to be found in clear statements of what they agreed on and what their areas of disagreement were. Each Church was asked to put forward frankly their views through their representatives. No discussion was held on who is right and who is wrong. Once the different views and positions of the Churches on important matters of "faith and order" were objectively presented it was easy to compare them and see the agreements and disagreements among them. At this first stage of the ecumenical movement, therefore, naturally we find a lot of ecumenical documents stating simply the agreements and differences among the Churches. And to the surprise of all it was discovered that they had much more in common than they had thought, that they had a fundamental unity which would provide the strong basis needed for the visible unity of the Churches.

At this stage the Churches perhaps thought they could easily achieve visible unity by enlarging the list of agreements and by reducing the list of disagreements to the minimum. But this optimism gradually vanished. The seriousness and stubbornness of the differences among the Churches began to be felt more and more, and no way was found to tackle and solve the fundamental differences between the "authoritarian" and "personal" types of the Churches or between the "Catholic" and "Protestant" types. Besides, by the continuous use of just the comparative method without any critical approach the positions of the Churches became hardened and as a consequence there was a strong revival of confessionalism. By 'confessionalism' we mean the excessive consciousness of and concern for the particular doctrines and traditions of one's own denomination irrespective of the consideration of truth, and the consequent tendency of self-sufficiency and

11. See, Kuncheria Pathil, *Models in Ecumenical Dialogue*, (Bangalore : Dharmaram Publications, 1981). The book presents the story of the Churches' encounter in the "Faith and Order Movement" and the different stages and methods of this encounter.

self-absolutism. Although denominations are needed and healthy, denominationalism or confessionalism is wrong because these partial truths are isolated and absolutized with the refusal and unwillingness to relate them with those held by others.

With the asset of a better mutual understanding the Churches made a second step in their search for visible unity. Mere comparative method gave way to the employment of more critical methods. The positions, views, practices and life-styles of the Churches were tested against the person of Jesus Christ and his teachings, against Biblical witness and Apostolic Tradition. All Churches were asked to examine critically whether they faithfully preserved, handed down and interpreted the Apostolic tradition or whether they obscured, distorted and fragmented it. This method generally called *Christological method* called for a common Biblical, historical and theological study and search by all the Churches together of the issues that had historically divided them and on the questions that still divide them. So here they started from their common centre, Jesus Christ, rather than from the individual views of each Church. They believed that when they become closer to Christ they would be closer to one another just as all the parts of a circle will be closer to each other when they come closer to the centre. Once they discovered the centre and from there moved to the periphery, many of the differences among them were found to be secondary. They became convinced that their fundamental unity in Jesus Christ should not be inhibited by other differences. If at the first stage each Church had regarded itself as the centre and other Churches as planets rotating around it, at this second stage all Churches perceived Christ as the centre around whom all of them were rotating.

The model of unity the Churches had set before them at this stage of the ecumenical movement was "One United Church", where all the differences are to be dissolved. The model of the Church of South India (CSI), where four Protestant Churches (Anglicans, Presbyterians, Methodists and Congregationalists) had left behind their separate identities and opted for a new identity, was very much alive in the minds of the Churches. The Churches thought that the common Biblical and historical studies would at last lead them to the one true Ecclesiology, to the one true Christology, to the one true Pneumatology, to the one true Sacramentology, and to the one true doctrine of the ministry and thus the differences among them could be overcome. But this model of unity and its assumption of uniformity or monolithic unity in the Biblical witness were challenged by the Biblical

Scholars and historians who spoke of the existence of a diversity of Ecclesiologies, Christologies, Pneumatologies, Sacramentologies, and diverse concepts of ministry in the New Testament and in the Early Church. And in the Ecumenical Movement this view was gradually established as a result of common Biblical and historical studies. Thus the Churches once again realized that their diversities and differences were not to be simply dismissed or dissolved but that they were significant, to a great extent legitimate, and complementary. What in fact happened at this third stage was a rediscovery of the original vision of Christian 'unity in diversity.'

Does it mean that the Churches' search for unity in the Ecumenical Movement has to be abandoned and the present divisions in the Church will simply continue? Not at all. Divisions in the one Church have to be healed. Walls of separation between the Churches have to be removed. But on the other hand, diversity of plurality of Churches has to be accepted. What this unity requires today is the *mutual recognition of the Churches*. Could the divided Churches simply recognize each other as they are today irrespective of what they believe and what they do? Certainly not. Mutual recognition of the Churches is a responsible act. Every Church has a right and responsibility to challenge the other Churches to show that they are in continuity with the original faith and vision of the New Testament Christianity. The Apostolic and primitive Christian communities, all of them without exception, confessed and proclaimed the Lordship of Jesus Christ, believed that they were one fellowship in the Church as the one Body of Christ, loved and served all without exception, worshipped the One God, the Father of Jesus Christ, celebrated the mysteries of Baptism and Eucharist as the 'memorial' of Christ, continued the Apostolic ministry of unity and supervision in one form or another, and they all had the Scriptures and the Apostolic Tradition as their authoritative source and heritage. If any Church has deviated in the course of time from this original faith and vision of Christianity it has to be reformed and renewed by recapturing the original spirit and inspiration. By divisions and centuries of separated existence a certain amount of fragmentation and distortion has, in fact, occurred in the different Churches and this can be corrected only when the different Churches are once again related to one another in mutual dialogue, communication, criticism and give and take. Thus all Churches have to grow in this ecumenical process where each Church must be able to discern clearly the same faith in all the Churches in spite of their varied and different expressions. The unity of faith has to be searched in the totality of doctrines, beliefs, practices, forms of worship, proclamations

and Christian life-styles. After all the task of identifying the faith of others is not an easy job. It is a matter of sharing in their experience, of mutual trust and commitment and of living together in fellowship and hope.

But as we have seen above, while discussing the diversity in the earliest forms of Christianity, within this basic Christian unity there were enormous differences and diversities in the expression of this common Christian faith and Tradition. Although the several existing Churches are not as such a historical continuation of the diversity of the New Testament Christianity, they very well represent to us today that original spirit of diversity. And we are convinced today that the rich diversity of the existing Churches is needed for the Catholicity or wholeness of Christianity. Plurality or diversity of the Churches is not only a historical fact, but also a philosophical and theological principle. The diversity and differences among the Churches arise out of the inexhaustible mystery of the Gospel heritage and out of the diversity and limitations of the human context. The inexhaustible mystery of God's revelation in Jesus Christ cannot be contained in just one of its expressions. Our human systems and structures are all challenged by the Word of God. And on the human side, the diversity and the finiteness of the modes of human existence and human perceptions which are based on man's psycho-somatic, socio-economic, and cultural differences, inevitably lead to the diversity in human understandings, systems, structures, and creations. We wish to mention here that the Second Vatican Council in several of its documents has officially endorsed this rich diversity of the Churches. The Council spoke about the "different ways" of the Eastern and Western Churches, and by this the Council meant a plurality of customs, disciplines, liturgy, spirituality, government, theology and even plurality in the formulation of Christian doctrine.¹² Pope John XXIII in his inaugural address to the Council said: "The deposit of faith is one thing; the way it is presented is another. For the truths preserved in our sacred doctrine can retain the same substance and meaning under different forms of expression."¹³ In short, Christian unity must be coupled with Christian diversity.

Finally, Christian 'unity in diversity' includes and points to the unity in diversity of the whole of humankind. The Churches' search for unity in diversity, therefore, is not a narrow and Church-centred concern. The Church sees itself as the sign and sacrament of the unity of the whole of

12. *Decree on Ecumenism*, nos. 4, 14, 17.

13. *Acta Apostolicae Sedes*, 54 (1962), p. 792.

humankind, and as the sign the Church proclaims, celebrates and points to the unity in diversity of the whole of humankind. The concern of the Christian Ecumenical Movement, therefore, is not merely to heal the doctrinal and religious disunity among the Churches, but to heal all forms of divisions both in the Church and in the world which have been perpetuated in the name of class, race, sex, nationality, language, culture, ideology and religion. Thus the Christian religious model of 'unity in diversity' could be a valuable contribution to a greater vision of the unity in diversity of the whole of humankind.