MISSION, EVANGELISM, AND PROSELYTISM IN CHRISTIANITY: MAINLINE CONCEPTIONS AS REFLECTED IN CHURCH DOCUMENTS

Joel A. Nichols*

INTRODUCTION

A fundamental aspect of any religion is the right and duty to pass the faith from one person to another. Religious beliefs held by one generation must be passed on to another generation or the religion will die. Religious beliefs held by members of one faith tradition must be shared with persons who hold different beliefs (or no beliefs) or the faith tradition can not grow. Christianity is no different.

From the birth of the religion, Christians have been spreading their faith. The New Testament canon, and particularly the words of Jesus, mandate the expansion of the Christian faith. The “Great Commission” of Jesus lays the groundwork for Christian missions: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.”

Jesus’ entire life is replete with stories and actions about mission. He told stories about “scattering the seed” and letting the soil respond; he explained this parable by explicitly claiming that the “soils” were people of various dispositions who would respond to His message in one way or another. He went to cities and villages, teaching the good news of the kingdom and curing diseases. He had compassion on the multitudes, and told his disciples that “the harvest is plen-

---

* Candidate for J.D., Emory University School of Law and M.Div., Candler School of Theology, (May 1998). B.A., Abilene Christian University (1995). The author expresses his deep appreciation to Professor John Witte, Jr. for his guidance and encouragement. Much thanks to Meaghan R. Hogan, Rebecca L. Lightman, Chad I. Michaelson, and Allison K. Myers who provided able editorial assistance. Special thanks to Jennifer Nichols for her faithful commitment and assistance.

1 Matthew 28:19-20 (NRSV). See also the version in Mark 16:15 (“Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation”).

2 Mark 4:1-20.
tiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. He sent the twelve apostles forth with specific instructions for communicating the "good news." This constituted the first "mission" of the Christian movement.

Just as Christian theology finds impetus for mission in its canon, it also find impetus in the Trinitarian nature of God. God the Father sent His only Son into the world. Similarly, God the Father (and some say the Son also) sent forth the Holy Spirit into the world. The Trinitarian God has now sent forth His people, as individuals and as His Church, into the world. These sendings were all for the salvation of humans, ensuring that all persons could hear the Good News of God.

Through the centuries, different names have been given to this missionary enterprise: witness (martyria), proselytism, mission, evangelism. Spreading the faith has occurred through a variety of methods: proclamation, witness, eucharistic celebration, social activism, martyrdom, and, unfortunately, the use of force. The Crusades, pogroms, forced baptisms, and tortured confessions emerge as examples from history of Christians forcibly spreading their

---

4 Matthew 10:1 - 11:1. Jack Dean Kingsbury, Matthew as Story 130 (2d ed. 1988) contends that the entire purpose of the Christian community, from Matthew's perspective, is summarized by Jesus in this activity: Christians are "to be 'fishers of men,' that is, to engage in mission in line with the broad schema of first Israel (10:5b-6) and then the nations (28:19)."
message. Unhappily, theological justification has been offered for the use of force since the time of St. Augustine. Using Jesus' parable of a great feast, Augustine interpreted the words "compelle intrare" (compel them to come in) as applicable to those who believed something other than orthodox doctrine: the heretics. Augustine's interpretation gave theological justification to all manner of pressure and persecution of the heterodox over the centuries.

Conversely, Christian missions have often been on the receiving end of violent treatment. Any intimate look into the history of religions leaves indelible impressions of abuses of the religious freedom that should be afforded each individual—the freedom to hold one's own beliefs, the freedom to express one's own beliefs, and the freedom to communicate those beliefs to others in appropriate settings in an attempt at persuasion.

Since Christianity is, by its nature, a missionary faith, Christians claim the right to attempt to persuade others of the truth of their faith. Of course, the right to attempt to convince people to change their religious beliefs stands in tension with the other party's right to privacy. In Christian terms, therefore, the Great Commission stands in op-

---

8 For an excellent rendering of this history, see Brian Tierney, Religious Rights: An Historical Perspective, in RELIGIOUS HUMAN RIGHTS IN GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE: RELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVES 17, 19-21 (John Witte, Jr. & Johan D. van der Vyver eds., 1996). Unfortunately, theologians such as Thomas Aquinas continued to use Augustine's interpretation through the years. Id. at 31-33.
position to the second great commandment ("Love your neighbor as yourself").

The word "proselytism" in recent years has come to convey a sense of improper evangelism. Christian groups condemn proselytism and routinely use the term only in its negative sense. All agree that proselytism is wrong, but none admit engagement in it. In discussing proselytism, one helpful distinction to bear in mind is between "in-reach proselytism," trying to claim the baptized but still immature believers, or "nominal Christians," while sustaining mature believers, and "out-reach proselytism," attempting to convert believers of different or no faiths, and thereby gain new adherents. Christian groups believe strongly in in-reach proselytism because it concerns their own denomination. Most disputes arise over out-reach proselytism, and Christian groups lack a uniform view on this topic.

Discussions about proselytism and religious freedom, at their core, implicate the various theologies and missiologies of the groups involved. Discerning the relevant theologies and missiologies of the various Christian confessions requires careful parsing of their respective theological and

---

10 The relevant scriptures are Matthew 28:19 and Matthew 22:39, respectively.

11 Note that this is a different usage from common legal terminology, which adopts a neutral connotation for the word. In legal circles, "proselytism" is commonly used to designate all kinds of evangelistic activities, with a distinction then drawn between "legitimate proselytism" and "illegitimate proselytism." Christian groups make a similar distinction, but use the terms "evangelism" and "proselytism" to denote these two ideas.

Compare WEBSTER’S NINTH NEW COLLEGIATE DICTIONARY, 945 (1983) ("proselytize . . . to induce someone to convert to one’s faith [or] to recruit someone to join one’s party institution, or cause"); A DICTIONARY OF MODERN LEGAL USE 444 (1987); (confirming this usage in the legal realm) with THE WESTMINSTER DICTIONARY OF CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY 475-76 (1983) ("proselytism . . . . Today proselytism is used in a negative sense to characterize [improper] evangelism . . . . Both the World Council of Churches since the 1960s and the Vatican more recently have accepted the term proselytism to describe any kind of manipulation of another or en- croachment upon their personal freedom to choose"); A CONCISE DICTIONARY OF THEOLOGY 195 (1991) ("proselytism . . . proselytism almost always now has the negative meaning of forcing or otherwise manipulating people into accepting a particular faith").
missiological statements. Only through such a parsing can one embark on an informed discussion concerning evangelism and proselytism.

Gathering authoritative theological and missiological statements for all the Christian faith traditions is certainly a laudable goal, but unfortunately not a realistic one. Almost immediately the need for some generalizations appears. Following a standard categorization, used by James Scherer and Stephen Bevans, this Article will look at four major segments of Christianity: Roman Catholicism, Evangelical Protestantism, Conciliar Ecumenical Christianity, and Eastern Orthodoxy. Recognizing that these groups are at once over-inclusive and under-inclusive, the four groups fairly represent prominent and well-stated Christian views on evangelism, proselytism, and human rights.

The Roman Catholic Church considers all those who are born into the Church and baptized as infants to be Christians. These persons are the responsibility of the Catholic Church, even if their faith commitment is only nominal. The Catholic Church has an obligation to be involved in mission in lands that are deemed to need the Gospel message. Mission begins with proclamation, but also includes social action, including the notion of liberation and the advocacy of political and economic freedom. Dialogue with other religions is seen as mutually advantageous for all parties involved. The Catholic Church has produced a number of authoritative documents respecting missions and evangelism. However, these documents tend to be quite vague and often do not address specific situations.

---


13 NEW DIRECTIONS IN MISSION, supra note 12.

14 See infra Part I.
Evangelical Protestants\textsuperscript{15} perceive evangelism primarily as proclamation. An individual's relationship with God is viewed as primary. Evangelicals stress the uniqueness and all-sufficiency of Jesus; this leads to a rejection of interreligious dialogue. From the evangelical view, nominal believers need to hear anew the message of the gospel, and the evangelicals have the responsibility to share this message. The Great Commission of Jesus is taken very seriously and requires effort on the part of every believer. Evangelicals believe that every nation contains persons who need to hear the message of Jesus. Evangelical documents are less authoritative, and tend to be somewhat vague as well. Evangelicals usually have a more narrow view of who is an active Christian believer (as defined by an individual relationship with God); therefore, evangelicals are more susceptible to charges of proselytism.

The Conciliar Ecumenical movement\textsuperscript{16} focuses primarily on ecumenism and unity among the churches. Mission and evangelism are not ignored, though. Since unity is the primary consideration, any competition between Christian groups or parallel structures within societies is questioned. According to ecumenicals, evangelism can occur in a number of ways: proclamation, eucharistic celebration, social action, and prayer. Ecumenicals are receptive to dialogue with persons of other faiths, since respect for human dignity is of primary importance. The Conciliar Ecumenical movement has produced some documents, but, of course, they consist of broad concepts. While nominal believers are called back to faith, the documents never address who may evangelize such persons. The emphasis on ecumenism leads to a broad definition of who is a Christian, in addition to the broad definition of evangelism. Appropriate boundaries and methods of evangelism are not agreed upon in these documents.

\textsuperscript{15} See infra Part II.
\textsuperscript{16} See infra Part III.
Eastern Orthodox churches\footnote{See infra Part IV.} have a well-defined theology which undergirds their stance on evangelism. Orthodox Churches stress the unity of the church as a key to evangelism. Membership in the Church is connected with belonging to a body of people, and is often tied to ethnic and/or nationalistic groups. Orthodox Churches view any interreligious competition as fundamentally contrary to the true apostolic spirit of Christianity. Proclamation is relegated to an equal, or even subordinate, role compared with the eucharistic witness of the church, as well as her social witness. Evangelism is directed not just to persons, but to the whole structure of a culture and society. This means that, eventually, a Christian culture will emerge.

Orthodox documents are increasingly concerned with the problem of proselytism in what they consider to be their lands. The very structure of Orthodoxy, broken down into autocephalous churches in certain nations, reveals Orthodox ecclesiology. Entire nations are considered to be Orthodox, including Russia. The tumultuous political, social, cultural, and economic changes that have occurred over the past decade have forced Orthodox Churches to "compete" in new ways. Orthodox ecclesiology and missiology have been tested concretely. As a result of the opening of Orthodox lands to foreign missionaries, Orthodox Churches have increasingly advocated state intervention and assistance against what they consider "proselytism" by other churches.\footnote{The most pressing example is the new Russian law. On the Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations. Federal Law No. 125-FZ (Sept. 26, 1997) available in LEXIS, Intlaw Library, Rfarch File ["Freedom of Conscience Law"]. This law is also available at On the Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations (visited Feb. 7, 1998) <http://www.stetson.edu/~psteves.relnews.freedom_of_conscience.html>.} While this state intervention in religion is viewed by many as contrary to human rights norms, there is an unbending, hardened Orthodox theology that underlies it. Legal settlements cannot provide all the answers to situations which involve such deep theological issues.
Each of these four positions will be considered in turn, using official documents as a guide.

I. ROMAN CATHOLICISM

A. *Ad Gentes*

The foundation for modern Roman Catholic missiology was laid by the Second Vatican Council. The seminal document is the "Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity" (*Ad Gentes*),\(^{19}\) issued December 7, 1965 from Rome. *Ad Gentes* begins by reaffirming that "the Church on earth is by its very nature missionary."\(^{20}\) The missionary nature of the Church is derivative of the mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit. Just as the Father sent the Son and the Spirit into the world through His love, so the Church is now sent into the world through God's love.

Grounding the missionary nature of the Church in the Godhead itself has several salutary effects. First, the rationale for mission can be clearly articulated in familiar biblical language. Christ proclaimed his own mission by claiming, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he anointed me; to bring good news to the poor he sent me, to heal the broken-hearted, to proclaim to the captive release, and sight to the blind."\(^{21}\) On another occasion Christ claimed, "The Son of man has come to seek and to save what was lost."\(^{22}\) The Church, as the Body of Christ, has assumed Christ's missionizing nature and task. Second, grounding the rationale for mission in the Godhead provides validation for the missionary actions of the Church.

---

\(^{19}\) Decree of the Church's Missionary Activity *reprinted in Missions and Religions* 82-120 (Austin Flannery, OP, ed., Redmond Fitzmaurice, OP, trans., 1968) ("Ad Gentes").

\(^{20}\) *Ad Gentes* ¶ 2.


through granting God the Father’s approbation to such activities. Third, and most importantly, the missionary nature of the Church stems from the activity of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the true agent of mission, and that agent is active in and through the Church. Claiming the Holy Spirit allows the Church to designate its activities as God-ordained.

The Church is obligated to “proclaim the faith and salvation which comes from Christ” because Christ commanded his apostles (and thus the Church) to go into all nations and make disciples.\(^{23}\) The Church carries out its mission to all the nations as it obediently “makes itself fully present to all men and peoples in order to lead them to the faith, freedom and peace of Christ by the example of its life and teaching, by the sacraments and other means of grace.”\(^{24}\) The purpose of missionary activity is to “make Christ present” to those people being evangelized, so that they may know the mystery and love of Christ.\(^{25}\)

The manifestation of Christ through the Church occurs through both proclamation of the Gospel and administration of the sacraments. The Vatican Council stressed the importance of proclamation, designating the bishop as, “above all, a preacher of the faith who brings new disciples to Christ.”\(^{26}\) This preacher of the faith does not have free reign, however. A bishop should be properly acquainted with the conditions among those he is pastoring, as well as with the general conditions of the region or nation. He should take into account social status, the motivational level of the listeners, and the urban or rural nature of the

\(^{23}\) \textit{Ad Gentes}, supra note 19, ¶ 5 (referring to Matthew 28:19 and Mark 16:15 ff.).
\(^{24}\) \textit{Id.}
\(^{25}\) \textit{Id.} ¶ 9.
\(^{26}\) \textit{Id.} ¶ 20. \textit{See also Second Vatican Council, Lumen Gentium} (Dogmatic Constitution of the Church) ¶ 25 (1964).
community, and should be sensitive to the native practices of the people.\textsuperscript{27}

Administration of the sacraments is equally vital. Of the seven sacraments, the Eucharist is the “centre and summit.”\textsuperscript{28} Through the breaking of bread and taking of wine, the mystery of Christ is strongly proclaimed, not only to believers, but also to those outside the Church. It is through participation in the Eucharist that the Church represents the presence of God in the world and is most influential as a witness for God.

The establishment and maintenance of multiple Christian communities is critical to mission. Missionaries are encouraged to “raise up” communities of the faithful, so that as the believing Christians live holy lives, those around them will see God’s activity. “In this way the christian community will become a sign of God’s presence in the world.”\textsuperscript{29}

To achieve the proper sensitivity in preaching the word, missionaries and preachers must place themselves among the groups to whom they wish to minister and commit themselves to the specific social and cultural environment.\textsuperscript{30} Such immersion will lead not only to increased receptivity, but to a more appropriate approach to the particular situation. \textit{Ad Gentes} commits itself to the fact that “seeds of the Word” lay hidden among groups who had not yet heard the message of salvation through Christ. These “seeds of the Word” are pieces of the truth of the message of salvation that pre-exist in other cultures and religions, but the seeds in themselves are not the whole truth of salvation. Missionaries should seek to uncover these seeds with gladness and respect.\textsuperscript{31} Uncovering the seeds with respect will not

\textsuperscript{27} \textit{Ad Gentes}, supra note 19, ¶ 20.
\textsuperscript{28} Id ¶ 9.
\textsuperscript{29} Id. 15.
\textsuperscript{30} Id. ¶ 10.
\textsuperscript{31} Id. ¶ 11.
only lend credibility to the messenger, but to the message as well. However, admission that seeds of the Word lie in indigenous religions and traditions is not a concession that those indigenous beliefs are sufficient for salvation through Jesus. Acknowledgment of the seeds is only a credit to the power of God and His grace as He continually seeks to reveal Himself to all people through all means possible.

*Ad Gentes* takes an additional step in expressing the need for missionaries to understand and associate with people within their own traditions and culture: it urges a movement beyond accepting the status quo. Although the Church is called to join with people of every condition, "especially with the poor and afflicted," the Church must *not* leave people in that position.\(^\text{32}\) Rather, the purpose of joining in solidarity with people in their current status is to reveal the love and salvation of Christ. This revelation should be accompanied by conduct that seeks to transform people and situations. The Church should seek to educate children and young people, fight against famine and disease, promote better living and working conditions, and, generally, bring peace into the world.\(^\text{33}\) These activities of the church are based not only upon the desire to convert people to Christ, but grow out of a genuine belief in human dignity.\(^\text{34}\) Thus, the Second Vatican Council made a clear statement about human rights in the midst of expressing appropriate behavior for the Church in mission activities. This belief in human dignity undergirds many facets of the Catholic Church's life, including missions.\(^\text{35}\)

\(^\text{32}\) Id. ¶ 12.
\(^\text{33}\) Id. ¶ 10.
\(^\text{34}\) Id. ¶ 12. See also SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, **DIGNITATIS HUMANAE (DECLARATION ON RELIGIOUS FREEDOM)** (1965), reprinted in EDNA MCDONAGH, **FREEDOM OR INTOLERANCE? THE DECLARATION ON RELIGIOUS FREEDOM OF VATICAN COUNCIL II**, 13 (1967).
\(^\text{35}\) For the position of the Catholic Church on human rights and human dignity, see esp. A CENTURY OF CATHOLIC SOCIAL THOUGHT (George Weigel & Robert Royal eds., 1991) and the documents discussed therein. See also Shupack, supra note 9; Witte, supra note 9; BUILDING THE FREE SOCIETY (George Weigel & Robert Royal
According to the Catholic Church, clergy and laity alike should be involved in mission activity. The laity belong both to the people of God and to civil society. As dual citizens, they should participate fully and actively in their culture and society through education, social activities, and individual professions. However, their "principal duty...is to bear witness to Christ."\textsuperscript{36} Fulfillment of this principal duty means that the lay faithful must participate fully in the civic community, but must do so in a manner that brings purity and "newness of life" to it. They should keep with the traditions of their land, but seek to imbue the entire society with the light and love of Christ.\textsuperscript{37}

\textit{Ad Gentes} explains that non-Christians should "freely turn to the Lord."\textsuperscript{38} Though the heart of the non-Christian must be opened by the Holy Spirit before such "free" turning can occur, the freedom of the act is critical. The document denounces all forms of evangelism that involve any form of coercion: "The Church strictly forbids that anyone should be forced to accept the faith, or be induced or enticed by unworthy devices; as it likewise strongly defends the right that no one should be frightened away from the faith by unjust persecutions."\textsuperscript{39} Thus, although the word "proselytism" does not appear in \textit{Ad Gentes}, the sentiment against it clearly does. However, this statement comprises the extent of the discussion of illegitimate evangelism. No details concerning inappropriate methods or modes of evangelism are listed, though some guidelines for appropriate evangelism are listed in the latter part of the document (and have been spelled out above in this Article).

\textit{Ad Gentes} never considers who is a candidate for evangelism. The document uses the term "non-Christian," but

\textsuperscript{36} Ad Gentes, supra note 19, ¶ 21.
\textsuperscript{37} Id.
\textsuperscript{38} Id. ¶ 13.
\textsuperscript{39} Id.
never defines it. The inference can be drawn that all persons who are baptized are Christians, since “all baptized people are called upon to come together in one flock.”\footnote{Id. ¶ 6.} However, no mention is made of persons who were once baptized and are no longer active members of Christian communities. Such persons seem to be Christians in name only (“nominal Christians”). The document does not denote whether such persons should be placed in the category of “Christians” or the category of “non-Christians.”

This simple Christian versus non-Christian typology introduces a fundamental tension between Catholic (and often Orthodox) understandings and some Protestant missiologies. It is over nominal Christians that many skirmishes are fought. Non-Catholics often consider such persons proper candidates for Christian evangelism while Catholics consider such persons as still members of the Church, though not fully participating members. Such a difference in viewpoint can lead to major differences in evangelistic approaches and can cause hostile feelings when the Catholic Church feels its members (the nominal Christians) are being “proselytized” by other Christian groups. Recent flare-ups in once predominantly Catholic Latin American and Eastern European countries are examples of this problem.

Just as only two categories of people exist according to Ad Gentes, similarly, only two kinds of territories exist. The document designates these two places as “lands which are already Christian” and as “missionary lands.”\footnote{Id. ¶ 41.} Once again, the distinction is set forth vaguely. This leads to a similar problem with non-Catholics. On one hand, many Protestant groups are uncomfortable labeling any land as “already Christian,” since Christianity is an individual choice and not a choice made by a country as a whole. Many Orthodox Christians, on the other hand, would recognize Christian
countries. But they explain that Catholics apply a different standard to their lands and treat the Orthodox countries as missionary lands when in fact they are already Christian lands. So, although *Ad Gentes* indicates that "missionary lands" are the proper place for evangelism, that designation has not proved useful in the broader ecumenical discussion of proselytism and evangelism.

Finally, *Ad Gentes* addresses cooperation in mission efforts, principally focusing on cooperation among various Catholic churches and dioceses. The document lacks any indication regarding whether cooperation with other professing Christian groups should be undertaken. In organizing mission activity, *Ad Gentes* advocates consolidation of mission efforts under one segment ("Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith") and indicates that "[t]he rights of the Eastern Churches must, however, be safeguarded." This reference to "the Eastern Churches" is somewhat vague: it may be a reference solely to the Orthodox churches, or may include the Uniate churches. If it includes the Uniate churches, this seems an inadequate way to deal with the tension aroused between the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church. If it does not include Uniate churches, then no mention is made of Uniate churches and the document does not address one of the fundamental concerns of Christian groups outside the Catholic Church concerning proselytism.

*Ad Gentes* is a landmark document that establishes a baseline from which all discussions of Catholic missions must start. The document is neither a legal code nor a manual of mission ethics, but a statement of fundamental principles. Its generalities are advantageous in promoting

---

42 *Id. ¶¶ 35-41.*
43 *Id. ¶ 29.*

44 Uniate churches practice the liturgy and adornments of the Orthodox churches, but recognize the Pope of the Catholic Church as having received the primary mandate from God. Frequent disagreements exist between Orthodox churches and Catholic churches concerning these Uniate churches.
the timelessness of the document and ensuring its relevance for posterity. These same qualities leave much room for speculation and emendation when attempting to apply the ideas to concrete situations.

Ad Gentes is also the benchmark by which all other Catholic statements on evangelism and proselytism must be measured. A host of documents have been produced by other Catholic sources, from the Pope to individual priests and bishops, concerning specific applications of the ideas promulgated by the Second Vatican Council. These subsequent developments will now be considered.

B. Evangelii Nuntiandi

Ten years after the adjournment of the Second Vatican Council, Pope Paul VI promulgated an apostolic exhortation entitled “On Evangelization in the Modern World” (Evangelii Nuntiandi). This landmark work was an attempt to systematize and prescribe an appropriate theology and framework for missions. One year prior to the release of Evangelii Nuntiandi, the Third Synod of Bishops had met and discussed evangelization, but issued only a brief closing statement, with a request that the pope issue a fuller statement at a later date. The apostolic exhortation Evangelii Nuntiandi is the fulfillment of that request and the summation and commentary on the work of the Third Synod of Bishops.

Evangelii Nuntiandi proclaims boldly that “the task of evangelizing all people constitutes the essential mission of

---


45 While apostolic exhortations do not carry the same weight as conciliar statements, or even encyclicals (see infra note 78 and accompanying text), they are still significantly influential and authoritative since they bear the imprimatur of the pope.
the Church."\textsuperscript{47} Furthermore, the Church exists in order to evangelize, "that is to say, in order to preach and teach, to be the channel of the gift of grace, to reconcile sinners with God, and to perpetuate Christ's sacrifice in the Mass, which is the memorial of his death and glorious resurrection."\textsuperscript{48} Evangelism thus constitutes the deepest identity of the Church. This is because the Church was born of the evangelism of Jesus and the Twelve, and then is consequently sent by Jesus, is evangelized herself, serves as the depository of the Good News to be proclaimed, and then sends out evangelizers.\textsuperscript{49}

\textit{Evangelii Nuntiandi} presents a series of definitions of evangelism. Proclamation (\textit{kerygma}) occupies a prominent place in evangelism and has become almost synonymous with evangelism. However, much more is involved. Evangelism is a complex process consisting of many elements: "the renewal of humanity, witness, explicit proclamation, inner adherence, entry into the community, acceptance of signs, apostolic initiative."\textsuperscript{50} Of these diverse elements, the primary one is witness. "Witness" can mean a number of things, but, at its core, means seeing and seeking the dignity and worth in every human, and living just lives that find solidarity with others in all things noble and good.\textsuperscript{51} Although witness is paramount, the various components of evangelism must be seen as synergistic. These components include the sacraments, for living out the sacraments is involved in the fulfillment of evangelism.\textsuperscript{52}

Conversion is defined as a transformation of humanity from within. The Church evangelizes by seeking such con-

\textsuperscript{47} \textit{Evangelii Nuntiandi, supra} note 45, \S 14 (quoting Declaration of the Synod Fathers, L'OSSERVATORE ROMANO (Oct. 27, 1974) \S 4 at 6).
\textsuperscript{48} \textit{Id.} \S 14.
\textsuperscript{49} \textit{Id.} \S 15.
\textsuperscript{50} \textit{Id.} \S 24.
\textsuperscript{51} \textit{Id.} \S 21, 26.
\textsuperscript{52} \textit{Id.} \S 28 ("[I]n its totality, evangelization ... consists in the implantation of the Church, which does not exist without the driving force which is the sacramental life culminating in the Eucharist").
version, through the power of the divine message, of “both the personal and collective consciences of the people, the activities in which they engage, and the lives and concrete milieu which are theirs.” Thus, conversion and transformation are not constructed as a personal response to Christ.64

*Evangelii Nuntiandi* touches briefly on “nominal Christians.” In the context of Christian witness, one of the questions an evangelizer must ask is whether the people with whom he is working “live as nominal Christians but according to principles that are in no way Christian.”65 Though the document later asserts that evangelism is appropriate for such a person,66 it does not outline what kind of evangelistic effort should ensue nor does it imply what the person’s standing is with God and with the Church. More importantly, the document omits any comment concerning whether nominal Christians are appropriate candidates for evangelism by members of other religions, other Christian confessions, or solely by the Catholic Church.

*Evangelii Nuntiandi* addresses the plight of persons who have been baptized into and maintain their membership in the Catholic Church and yet live out of communion. The pope asserts that “those who do not practice” their faith often fail to do so because they live and work in the midst of non-Christians and because the “non-practicing Christians” rationalize their lack of practice by appealing to an “interior religion, of personal independence or authenticity.” This segment of the population is said to resist evangelization through inertia and a slightly hostile attitude based on a familiarity with the evangelistic message.67 Although it

---

64 Id. ¶ 18.
65 Cf. the concept of conversion in *Redemptoris Missio*, infra note 85 and accompanying text.
67 Id. ¶ 52 (discussing those “people who have been baptized but who live quite outside the Christian life”).
68 Id. ¶ 56.
identifies them, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* does not offer suggestions or solutions about how to evangelize or deal with such non-practicing Christians. It says only that the Church’s evangelizing activity cannot ignore these people, but must seek appropriate language and means for relating the message to this group.

Pope Paul VI broaches briefly the subject of interreligious dialogue. The phrase “interreligious dialogue” is absent, but other religions are mentioned as respected and esteemed. Non-Christian religions are revered by the Church because they are the “living expression of the soul of vast groups of people.” Other religions carry with them the tradition of years of yearning and searching for God. It is true that these other religions possess “seeds of the Word,” however, they do not possess the full revelation through Christ, and thus the Church has an obligation to share the Gospel with them. “[T]hese multitudes have a right to know the riches of the mystery of Christ.” Interestingly, the document next mentions those Christians who are not in full communion with the Church. The Church would be “lacking in her duty if she did not give witness before them of the fullness of the revelation whose deposit she guards.” The text goes no further in explaining what this witness should be. This statement seemingly opens the door to evangelism of persons who are, to some degree, already adherents of the Christian faith. If so, then this would be, almost by definition, proselytism.

This apostolic exhortation goes to some lengths to elucidate the roles of various persons in evangelism. All persons are responsible for evangelism, which they perform in the name of the Church. The major roles for evangelistic efforts are reserved for the clergy, but the laity have a crucial

---

65 *Id.* ¶ 53.
66 *Id.* ¶ 11.
67 *Id.* ¶ 45, ¶ 53.
68 *Id.* ¶ 54.
69 *Id.* ¶ 60.
part to play as they witness in their everyday situations.\textsuperscript{63}
Even so, the principal role in evangelism belongs to none but God through the action of the Holy Spirit, because it is the Holy Spirit which “impels each individual to proclaim the Gospel, and it is [the Holy Spirit] who in the depths of consciences causes the word of salvation to be accepted and understood.”\textsuperscript{64}

\textit{Evangelii Nuntiandi} tackles the topic of proselytism fairly directly at the close of the document. The discussion is couched in terms of the evangelizer possessing an ever increasing love for those whom he is evangelizing. One consequence of this love is respect for the dignity and freedom of the subject of evangelism. The specific religious and spiritual situation of those being evangelized must be kept constantly in mind. “[N]o one has the right to force them excessively”,\textsuperscript{65} consciences and convictions must be respected. Once again, a solid theological basis has been laid, but the ramifications of the statements are not explained.

\textit{Evangelii Nuntiandi} further addresses religious liberty in the following section, but shifts the focus from the rights of the evangelized to the right of the evangelizers to proclaim the Gospel message. An interlocutor in the text asserts that “to impose a way, be it that of salvation, cannot but be a violation of religious liberty. Besides... why proclaim the Gospel when the whole world is saved by uprightness of heart?”\textsuperscript{66} The papal response is grounded in the documents of Vatican II, particularly \textit{Dignitatus Humanae} and \textit{Ad Gentes}. The pope agrees that it would be a grievous error to “impose something” on the consciences of other persons. However, to propose “the truth of the Gospel” and to identify the free options which that Gospel presents—“without coercion, or dishonorable or unworthy pressure”\textsuperscript{67}—is not an

\textsuperscript{\footnotesize{63} Id. \S 70.}
\textsuperscript{\footnotesize{64} Id. \S 75 (footnote omitted).}
\textsuperscript{\footnotesize{65} Id. \S 79.}
\textsuperscript{\footnotesize{66} Id. \S 80.}
\textsuperscript{\footnotesize{67} Id. (quoting DIGNITATIS HUMANAE, supra note 34).}
attack on religious liberty, but is rather the fullest respect of that liberty.\textsuperscript{68} The pope proceeds to claim that the respectful presentation of Christ is not only the right of Christians, but their duty. The “right” that is involved is the right of persons who have not heard the Gospel message to hear a free presentation of the message of salvation and then to possess the freedom to make an educated decision about that message.\textsuperscript{69}

The pope acknowledges that God can save whomever He desires, including those outside the church. However, he proposes that rather than ask questions about the importance of mission if God’s grace saves those outside the Church, each evangelist should instead ponder this thought: “men can gain salvation also in other ways, by God’s mercy, even though we do not preach the Gospel to them; but as for us, can we gain salvation if through negligence or fear or shame—what St. Paul called ‘blushing for the Gospel’—or as a result of false ideas fail to preach it? For that would be to betray the call of God . . . .”\textsuperscript{70}

Overall, then, Evangelii Nuntiandi builds upon the foundation of Ad Gentes. While it clarifies some of the concepts the Council set forth, it does not resolve all ambiguities. Once again, this is an asset for interpretation in a variety of ways, but does not clarify the position of the Catholic Church as much as one would like on issues of proselytism. Fortunately, this is not the last word on missions. Next, Redemptoris Missio will be considered.

C. Redemptoris Mission

The most recent authoritative statement on mission which amplifies Ad Gentes is Redemptoris Missio (Mission

\textsuperscript{68} Evangelii Nuntiandi, supra note 45, ¶ 80.
\textsuperscript{69} Id.
\textsuperscript{70} Id. (footnote omitted).
of the Redeemer). Issued December 7, 1990, Redemptor Missio is an encyclical letter of Pope John Paul II concerning "the permanent validity of the Church's missionary mandate." Encyclicals carry the highest authority within Catholic circles, below only such infallible conciliar statements as Ad Gentes.

Redemptor Missio further sets forth the groundwork for missions. Citing the emphasis on missionary activity in Ad Gentes, the encyclical claims that the third millennium is a "great springtime for Christianity." This springtime should not be simply watched as it comes, but ushered in through increased mission activity.

Like Ad Gentes, Redemptor Missio uses the term "non-Christians" without definition. The omission is striking. One cannot evangelize "non-Christians" unless that category of persons is clearly demarcated from those who are "Christians." As in Ad Gentes, the underlying assumption in Redemptor Missio seems to be that anyone who is baptized is a Christian, regardless of whether their "faith" or "commitment" to the Church is actual or nominal. This

---


\[72\] This release date is the twenty-fifth anniversary of Ad Gentes. Commemorative dates on encyclicals "are not merely a celebration of the event but are also an occasion to apply the teachings of the original document to later situations." Zago, Commentary on Redemptor Missio, supra note 71, at n.2.

\[73\] The notion of "infallibility" is reserved for decrees of ecumenical councils which are also approved by the pope, such as Ad Gentes, or solemn papal teachings pertaining to "faith and morals." In authoritative value, encyclicals, like Redemptor Missio, fall just below infallible statements. New Directions in Mission, supra note 12, at xiii.

\[74\] Redemptor Missio, supra note 71, ¶ 2, 86.

\[75\] Id. ¶ 4.

\[76\] See id. ¶ 50 ("it is true that some kind of communion, though imperfect, exists
has serious implications for evangelism, because any evangelism by other groups directed towards even those who are nominal Catholic adherents is considered to be proselytism by the Catholic hierarchy.

The pope implicitly says this in discussing ecumenical activity and the problem of “sects.” Ecumenical activity is praised as biblically mandated, but “Christian and para-Christian sects are sowing confusion by their activity.” “The expansion of these sects represents a threat for the Catholic Church” and for those with whom the Catholic Church is working. Categorizing those groups not organically connected to the Catholic Church as “sects” lends an aura of authorization to the activities of the Catholic Church and her partners while reflecting poorly on the other groups. Other groups, however, might maintain a different definition of who is Christian. For example, a person may have been baptized into the Catholic Church as an infant, yet not have attended mass or other activities during the course of their lives. The Catholic Church would likely consider this person a Christian; some non-Catholic groups would claim the person has no knowledge or understanding of God, and therefore is not a Christian and is an appropriate candidate for evangelism. The Catholic Church would call the activity “proselytism by sects” while the evangelizing group would dub the activity “evangelism by a legitimate Christian organization.”

Redemptoris Missio emphasizes freedom of conscience. The pope quotes the Second Vatican Council:

among all those who have received Baptism in Christ*).

Id.

See, e.g., discussion in Paul E. Sigmund, Religious Human Rights in Latin America, in Religious Human Rights in Global Perspective: Legal Perspectives 467, 472 (Johan D. van der Vyver & John Witte, Jr. eds., 1996). See also Alta/Baja California Bishops, Dimensions of a Response to Proselytism, 19 Origins 666 (March 15, 1990) (a scathing attack on “sects and new religious groups” and their purported methods of conversion).
The human person has a right to religious freedom . . . All should have immunity from coercion by individuals, or by groups, or by any human power, that no one should be forced to act against his conscience in religious matters, nor prevented from acting according to his conscience, whether in private or in public, whether alone or in association with others, within due limits.  

All persons should be able to make free choices concerning their religious beliefs and affiliations, a freedom that grows out of the freedom given to humans by God. God offers restoration and love to humans, but humans are free to reject the offer. Since God gives humans such latitude concerning a free response to God’s love, human mission activity should also allow for a free response.

The act of proclaiming Christ and bearing witness to him, "when done in a way that respects consciences, does not violate freedom." In this way, the Church advocates freedom of religion and of expression while maintaining its theological basis and right to mission activity. Religious freedom is "the premise and guarantee of all the freedoms that ensure the common good of individuals and peoples." Regardless of whether Catholicism constitutes a majority or minority in a country, Redemptoris Missio advocates religious freedom in all countries, for it is "an inalienable right of each and every human person."  

Additionally, this freedom involves the right of every person to hear the "Good News" of God through Christ. This is a critical point, since the aim of proclamation is Christian conversion, which means making a personal decision to accept "the saving sovereignty of Christ and become[e] his dis-

78 Redemptoris Missio, supra note 71, ¶ 8 (quoting DIGNITATIS HUMANÆ, supra note 3, ¶ 2).
79 Id. ¶ 7.
80 Id. ¶ 8.
81 Id. ¶ 39.
82 Id.
83 Id. ¶ 46.
The pope defends this call to conversion against accusations that it is “proselytism.” He says those outside the Catholic Church claim that “it is enough to help people become more human or more faithful to their own religion, that it is enough to build communities capable of working for justice, freedom, peace, and solidarity.” Aptly stated, such claims do not respect the right of the Catholic Church to proclaim the Good News nor the right and freedom of the recipient to respond to that message in the manner he or she chooses.

*Redemptoris Missio* does not provide a clear rationale, however, for mission efforts. The encyclical encourages mission work while simultaneously asserting that God may save persons who have never been converted to the faith and beliefs of the Catholic Church. Salvation in Christ is offered to all and is thus universal. This universality means that salvation is “granted not only to those who explicitly believe in Christ and have entered the Church.” For people who do not have an opportunity to come to know or accept the Good News or to enter the church, salvation in Christ “is accessible by virtue of a grace which . . . does not make them formally part of the Church but enlightens them in such a way which is accommodated to their spiritual and material situation.”

If persons outside the Church and persons who have not heard the message of Christ may be saved, then what is the rationale for missions? *Redemptoris Missio* asserts that evangelism is necessary because “true liberation consists in opening oneself to the love of Christ.” “Mission is an issue of faith, an accurate indicator of our faith in Christ and his love for us.” “Why mission? Because to us, as to St. Paul, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the un-
searchable riches of Christ' (Eph 3:8). Persons in the Church who have received the salvation and liberation that comes through Christ are obligated and compelled, by the very nature of that salvation and faith in Christ, to live evangelistic lives.

Earlier, Redemptoris Missio claimed that the purpose of the document itself was to instill "an interior renewal of faith and Christian life." "For missionary activity renews the Church, revitalizes faith and Christian identity, and offers fresh enthusiasm and new incentive. Faith is strengthened when it is given to others." If this quotation is read cynically, evangelism is not so much a service to other people, but a service to the Church and its members.

With regard to interreligious dialogue, Redemptoris Missio attempts to be very sensitive without falling into universalism. The encyclical falls short on this topic. Interreligious dialogue is claimed to be "part of the Church's evangelizing mission." The pope then cites a previous letter he sent, stating, "The fact that the followers of other religions can receive God's grace and be saved by Christ apart from ordinary means which he has established does not thereby cancel the call to faith and baptism which God wills for all people. Unfortunately, no rationale is given for this conclusory statement. It is only stated that the Church is the "ordinary means of salvation" and that "she alone

88 Id. ¶ 11.
89 Id. ¶ 2 (emphasis in original).
91 Redemptoris Missio, supra note 71, ¶ 55.
92 Id. (quoting Letter to the Fifth Plenary Assembly of Asian Bishops' Conferences (June 23, 1990), L'OSSERVATORE ROMANO (July 18, 1990), ¶ 4.
possesses the fullness of the means of salvation." Such
statements leave very open the charge of universalism,
which the Catholic Church has sought to avoid by carefully
stating that salvation comes through Christ alone.

Moreover, dialogue must be undertaken with the greatest
level of respect for adherents of other religions. Such dis-
cussions are said to be beneficial to the Church, since
“dialogue can enrich each side.” Other religions must then
have some insight into God’s love or God’s character that is
more readily available to them than to the Catholic Church. 
This seems an odd statement indeed, since the Church it-
self is supposed to be the fullest revelation of God’s pres-
ence on earth. Redemptoris Missio does state that there
should be no “abandonment of principles,” but this hardly
seems possible if there is to be true openness and receptiv-
ity on both sides.

While Redemptoris Missio is cryptic about its rationale for
missions, it is more forthcoming in its description of mis-
sion activities. Preaching constitutes the “first and funda-
mental way of serving the coming of the kingdom in indi-
viduals and in human society.” The message to be
preached is a call to conversion. Emphasis is given to
preaching to the poor and to those on the margins of so-
ciety, since Jesus showed them “special favor” in announc-
ing the Good News. The Church adds to her witness through
commitment to justice and peace, education and care of the
sick, aid to the poor and children, and general promotion of
human rights and human dignity. There is “a close con-
nection between the proclamation of the Gospel and human

---

93 Id. (citation omitted) (emphasis omitted).
94 Id. ¶ 56.
95 Id. ¶ 9 (“the Church] herself has been established as the universal sacrament
of salvation”).
96 Id. ¶ 20.
97 Id. ¶ 14.
98 Id. ¶ 20.
promotion." Essentially, social involvement and themes of liberation are very important in the work of the Church as she seeks to evangelize. Christian witness comes not only through proclaiming the Good News, but also through living out the Good News of the Kingdom and striving for its enactment in our time.

D. Other Documents

These three major documents on missions, evangelism, and proselytism form the framework for discussion of Roman Catholic missions within the past twenty-five years. These broad documents must be amplified at more local levels. One such amplification is Go and Make Disciples, a document produced by the United States Catholic Conference. This document cites Evangelii Nuntiandi, Redemptoris Missio, and the Bible liberally as it defines and describes the Catholic mission to the United States. Evangelization has a definition adapted directly from Evangelii Nuntiandi: "evangelizing means bringing the Good News of Jesus into every human situation and seeking to convert individuals and society by the divine power of the Gospel itself." This conversion is described as "the change of our lives that comes about through the power of the Holy Spirit."

Impetus for evangelization is grounded in the commands of Jesus. Evangelism is for all people:

Catholics should continually share the Gospel with those who have no church community, with those who

---

99 Id. ¶ 59.
100 UNITED STATES CATHOLIC CONFERENCE, GO AND MAKE DISCIPLES: A NATIONAL PLAN AND STRATEGY FOR CATHOLIC EVANGELIZATION IN THE UNITED STATES (1993).
101 Id. at 2 (citing Evangelii Nuntiandi, supra note 45, ¶ 18).
102 Id.
103 Id. at 4.
have given up active participation in the Catholic Church, as well as welcoming those seeking full communion with the Catholic Church. At the same time, we Catholics cannot proselytize—that is, manipulate or pressure anyone to join our Church. Such tactics contradict the Good News we announce and undermine the spirit of invitation that should characterize all true evangelization.\(^{104}\)

The overall aim of the booklet is to implement a plan for Catholic evangelization in the United States. There are three overarching goals: first, to bring about an enthusiasm in Catholics freely to share their faith with others; second, to invite all people in the United States "to hear the message of salvation in Jesus Christ so that they may come to join us in the fullness of the Catholic faith"; and third, to foster Christian values in society, "promoting the dignity of the human person, the importance of the family, and the common good of our society."\(^{106}\)

Each goal is set forth in greater detail later in the booklet alongside a number of strategies for implementation. These strategies range from creating a greater sense of prayer in the Mass to training Catholics for one-on-one evangelization, from deepening ecumenical involvement to serving the community through works of justice and love.\(^{106}\) This indicates a heightened emphasis on evangelism as proclamation to individuals, though the document clearly advocates social activism for the transformation and evangelization of society as well.

Another document which builds upon the foundation of the major Catholic documents is a pastoral statement on mission by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops entitled *To the Ends of the Earth*.\(^{107}\) The purposes of this

\(^{104}\) *Id.* at 8 (emphasis added).

\(^{106}\) *Id.* at 7-8.

\(^{106}\) *Id.* at 13-20.

\(^{107}\) NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS, TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH
document are twofold: 1) to provide a theological and pastoral instrument to stimulate interest in mission and to encourage involvement and 2) "to affirm missionaries in their efforts to proclaim the gospel and promote the reign of God."

Like other documents, *To the Ends of the Earth* begins by asserting the missionary nature of Jesus' ministry, as the Word made flesh. Before returning to the Father, Jesus charged his Church to continue his mission: "As the Father has sent me, so I send you."¹⁰⁹ "The Church, therefore, is missionary by her very nature."¹¹⁰ Moreover, the missionary task of the Church is grounded theologically in the Trinity. As the Son and the Spirit were sent from the Father, so the Church is sent into the world.¹¹¹

*To the Ends of the Earth* proclaims that we are operating in a "new missionary context." This means, among other things, that "colonial attitudes [of dominating evangelized people]"¹¹² must be overcome and all lands embraced as both mission-sending and mission-receiving.¹¹³ The task of missionaries in this new context is said to be the same as always: "preaching the gospel to those who have not heard it, baptizing them with the waters of salvation, caring for their physical well-being and forming Christian communities."¹¹⁴

(1986) ["TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH"]. While *Redemptoris Missio* was not yet written at the release of *To the Ends of the Earth*, thoughts from the former were incorporated into NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS, CELEBRATING "TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH": AN ANNIVERSARY STATEMENT ON WORLD MISSION (1996) ["ANNIVERSARY STATEMENT"].

¹⁰⁸ *To the Ends of the Earth*, supra note 107, ¶ 3.
¹¹⁰ *To the Ends of the Earth*, supra note 107, ¶ 2.
¹¹¹ *Id.* ¶ 22.
¹¹² *Id.* ¶ 20.
¹¹³ *Id.* ¶ 15.
¹¹⁴ *Id.* ¶ 17. ANNIVERSARY STATEMENT (supra note 107) couches mission in the following terms: "In a world hungry not just for bread, but for truth, justice, and a true respect and love for each human person, in a world hungry for the saving power that Christ's death and resurrection bring, we must continually preach the Good News." *Id.* at 2 (citation omitted).
Thus, while proclamation is one of the missionaries' tasks, it is not the only task. Mission should be holistic, emphasizing solidarity with humanity and liberation from both physical and political suffering.\footnote{To the Ends of the Earth, supra note 107, ¶¶ 46-49 (citation omitted).}

*To the Ends of the Earth* emphasizes that conversion is the goal of mission, not merely interreligious dialogue.\footnote{Id. ¶¶ 40-43.} Such conversion must be undertaken freely by the recipient, without coercion by the Church, since Jesus issued a free invitation to discipleship.\footnote{Id. ¶ 39.} While the document states that "[t]oday the dangers from proselytizing are real,"\footnote{Id. ¶ 29.} it does not define this statement. The statement is made in the context of ecumenical activity, so it seems fair to assume some reference to other Christian denominations. However, *To the Ends of the Earth* does not describe exactly who is an appropriate candidate for evangelism.\footnote{While there is mention of a preference for the poor (¶ 49) and a call to the powerful as well (¶ 50), there is no clear indication who should be evangelized. There is a call both to individuals (¶ 30) and to whole sociocultural groups (¶ 31), but no indication which individuals and groups need the missionary's message.}

Although documents from *Ad Gentes* and *To the Ends of the Earth* contain much information on missions and evangelism, it is somewhat hard to discern precisely the official beliefs of the Catholic Church. There is no clear discussion of who is a Christian, nor who is an appropriate candidate for evangelism. There is no clear statement concerning where missionary activity is to take place. Much theological argument is offered but it is neither clear nor cogent. While flexibility is advantageous for authoritative documents ensuring that interpretation of those documents can change with time, the lack of some clear statements, definitions, or clarifications of potential contradictions is unhelpful for our current study. This flexibility also leaves non-Catholics a bit unsure as to what to expect from the Roman
Catholic Church regarding missionary activity of non-Catholic persons. Neither can non-Catholics anticipate how and when the Catholic Church will respond when it feels inappropriate missionary incursions are occurring on adherents of Catholic beliefs.

II. EVANGELICAL PROTESTANTISM

Evangelical Christianity is a broad and diffuse group of denominations and individuals with a common focus on the authority of the Bible. Evangelicals tend to be less conservative and divisive than fundamentalists, but are often wary of hierarchical structures and organizations. This explains the designation of evangelicals as a separate group from the conciliar ecumenical movement. However, there is a lack of uniformity among evangelicals concerning the conciliar ecumenical movement. Some evangelicals are very receptive to the movement while others are very reticent. Generally speaking, evangelicals tend to promote unity and fellowship among Christians through common faith, trust, and prayer rather than through hierarchical or legal organizations.

Since evangelicals are a diverse group, any attempt to categorize strictly their views on missions and evangelism would be an elusive task indeed. However, the common denominator among evangelicals is a commitment to the authority of the scriptures and a continuing commitment to share the message of the scriptures with those who have not heard. These two commitments provide impetus for cooperation among many evangelicals, at least in the realm

---

120 NEW DIRECTIONS IN MISSION, supra note 12, at xvi.
121 See infra notes 160, 168 and accompanying text.
122 NEW DIRECTIONS IN MISSION, supra note 12, at xvi.
of missions and evangelism. The most recent and substantial cooperation has come through the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization (LCWE), commonly known as the Lausanne Movement. The Lausanne Movement is a loosely knit coalition of individuals, churches, and parachurch organizations bound together only by adherence to a single document—the Lausanne Covenant.

A. The Lausanne Covenant

The Lausanne Movement formally began in July 1974 at the International Congress on World Evangelization (ICOWE). This Congress was convened by Dr. Billy Graham, with major assistance from the evangelical journal Christianity Today and various other organizations. ICOWE included over 2700 evangelical representatives from more than 150 nations. These representatives participated in a convention intended to consolidate and focus efforts by evangelical Christians in the arena of world missions and evangelization. The enduring achievement of ICOWE was the Lausanne Covenant, a fifteen paragraph document that would become the basis for evangelical discussions on missions for years to come. This document, drafted under the leadership of Anglican evangelical John

---


125 Lausanne Covenant, reprinted in LET THE EARTH HEAR HIS VOICE: INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS ON WORLD EVANGELIZATION, LAUSANNE, SWITZERLAND (OFFICIAL REFERENCE VOLUME: PAPERS AND RESPONSES) 3-10 (J.D. Douglas ed., 1975) ["Lausanne Covenant"]. Of course, not all evangelical groups adhere to the Lausanne Covenant, since it is entirely voluntary. Some evangelical groups would feel that the Lausanne Covenant is not conservative enough, while others would feel it is not open enough.

126 Dr. Graham's influence on the evangelical movement is hard to overstate. A starting point in looking at his life is his autobiography. BILLY GRAHAM, JUST AS I AM (1997) (involvement in the Lausanne movement, 567-73).
R. W. Stott, is a statement of beliefs held by those evangelicals who adhere to the document. These adherents covenant “to pray, to plan, and to work together for the evangelization of the whole world.” All members of the Lausanne Movement sign this covenant and thereby agree to its terms. Twenty-three hundred people signed the document in a span of ten days at ICOWE, and a far greater number of individuals and groups have adopted the Lausanne Covenant after ICOWE. Thus, the Lausanne Covenant is an appropriate starting point for evaluating evangelical missiology since it represents a broad consensus even though it carries no official “authority.”

“We believe the Gospel is God’s good news for the whole world, and we are determined by his grace to obey Christ’s commission to proclaim it to every person and to make disciples of every nation.” So begins the Lausanne Covenant in its commitment to proclaiming the Gospel to every person in every nation. The remainder of the document consists of variations on this theme, elaborating and elucidating this one statement and examining its ramifications. The document proper begins with an explication of the triune God who calls people out of the world to Himself, and then sends His people back into the world to be his servants and witnesses. Thus, true mission originates from the nature of the God, who Himself is the ultimate instigator of mission.

Immediately after asserting the mission-mindedness of God, the Lausanne Covenant affirms the authority and power of the Bible. The word of God, through the Bible, possesses the power to accomplish God’s purpose of salvation for all men and women. The Holy Spirit moves and works through the words of the scriptures. The scriptures

---

118 Lausanne Covenant, supra note 125, Introduction.
119 Id. ¶ 1.
are not only sufficient for the evangelist's message, they are in fact "the only infallible rule of faith and practice."\footnote{130}

Next, the assertion of the universality and uniqueness of Christ is explained. This third paragraph is a bold rejection of interreligious dialogue that "implies that Christ speaks equally through all religions and ideologies." Credence is given to the claim that every person has some knowledge of God through nature, but this knowledge is not salvific because "people suppress the truth by their unrighteousness." Jesus Christ is the only mediator between God and humans. Asserting that Jesus is the Savior of the world is not a claim to universal salvation, but rather an affirmation of "God's love for a world of sinners and [an invitation for everyone] to respond to him as Saviour and Lord in the wholehearted personal commitment of repentance and faith."\footnote{131} These claims draw some clear distinctions from the position of nonevangelical groups whom the evangelicals interpret to be too universal in their theologies and who may not give enough prominence (or the right slant) to the "salvation through Christ alone" motif in scripture. However, in avoiding a commitment to interreligious dialogue, evangelicals quickly open themselves up to accusations of cultural insensitivity and proselytism.

The Lausanne Covenant defines evangelism thus: "Evangelism itself is the proclamation of the historical, biblical Christ as Saviour and Lord, with a view to persuading people to come to him personally and so be reconciled to God."\footnote{132} Essentially, evangelism is proclamation. Proclamation should be forthright and not withhold anything, including the cost of discipleship. Social action is not evangelism, nor is political liberation salvation. Nevertheless, "we affirm that evangelism and socio-political involvement

\footnote{130} Id. ¶ 2.\footnote{131} Id. ¶ 3.\footnote{132} Id. ¶ 4.
are both part of our Christian duty." Even in this statement a clear difference from the three other major Christian groups is evidenced: evangelicals define evangelism as proclamation of the Gospel. Although socio-political involvement is mentioned, it is not defined as part of evangelism, but rather as a separate duty of Christians.

Another major emphasis to come out of the Lausanne Covenant was a striving for more Christian unity among evangelicals in missions. The Church is the community of God’s people, and the entire Church has the responsibility to take the Gospel to the whole world. The visible unity of the Church is essential to the effectiveness of the Gospel message, since “disunity undermines our gospel of reconciliation.”

Unity need not come in the form of organizations, but can occur through cooperation, strategic planning, and the sharing of resources and experience. The competitiveness among various Christian groups is considered sinful and a hindrance to the message.

At the time of the writing of the document in 1974, evangelicals considered 2.7 billion people (2/3 of all people in the world) to be not yet evangelized. There is no mention of where these people live, but the inference is that these people are spread out over every continent. There is thus no mention of nations that are “Christian” nor nations that are “pagan.” For evangelicals, a person’s relationship to God is not based on where one lives or even whether one was baptized as an infant. A person’s relationship to God is based upon a personal, individual decision to follow the commands of Jesus Christ as expressed in the Bible and to live one’s life in accordance with the scriptures, maintaining an ongoing relationship with God. This definition of who is a

---

133 Id. ¶ 5.
134 Id. ¶ 7.
135 Id. ¶ 9.
136 See id. ("Missionaries should flow ever more freely from and to all six continents").
Christian shapes the evangelicals’ approach to missions and clearly influences who they believe needs to be evangelized.

The Lausanne Covenant seeks to maintain a respect for human rights and human freedom. The drafters admit that, in the past, they have been guilty of “manipulat[ing] hearers through pressure techniques,” and they repent of this.\(^{137}\) Moreover, the drafters clearly articulate their desire for “peace, justice, and liberty” in all places so the followers of God may worship Him freely and obey Him. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is specifically endorsed,\(^{138}\) and the adherents of the Lausanne Covenant pledge their support to the continuing advancement of human rights. The Lausanne Covenant states, “Because [men and women are] made in the image of God, every person, regardless of race, religion, colour, culture, class, sex or age, has an intrinsic dignity because of which he or she should be respected and served, not exploited.”\(^{139}\) It is on this premise of God-given dignity that the drafters stand to advocate religious freedom and toleration.

B. The Manila Manifesto

Following the release of the Lausanne Covenant, the Lausanne Movement gained momentum. A series of mini-consultations were held over the next fifteen years.\(^{140}\) The culmination of these sessions occurred in Manila in 1989. LCWE convened the Second International Congress of

\(^{137}\) Id. ¶ 12.
\(^{138}\) Id. ¶ 13.
\(^{139}\) Id. ¶ 5.
\(^{140}\) The papers produced at a number of these consultations are available in NEW DIRECTIONS IN MISSION, supra note 12, at 260-317 (including Consultation on Homogeneous Units (Pasadena, 1977); Consultation on Gospel and Culture (Willowbank, 1978); Consultation on Simple Life-Style (High Leigh, 1980); Consultation on World Evangelization (Pattaya, 1980); Consultation on the Relation of Evangelism and Social Responsibility (Grand Rapids, 1982); Consultation on the Church in Response to Human Need (Wheaton, 1983); The Christian Gospel and the Jewish People (Willowbank, 1989); Consultation on Jewish Evangelism (Zeist, 1991)).
Evangelization in July of 1989. Over 3000 individuals from 170 countries, all evangelicals held together by the Lausanne Covenant, gathered at Manila. The ensuing convention (commonly known as Lausanne II) reflected on a number of themes discussed during the intervening years, including Gospel and Culture, Evangelism and Social Responsibility, Simple Lifestyle, the Holy Spirit, and Conversion. The result of Lausanne II was a reaffirmation of the Lausanne Covenant and the promulgation of the Manila Manifesto.\textsuperscript{141} The Manila Manifesto considers the themes of the two congresses, “Proclaim Christ until he comes” and “Calling the Whole Church to take the Whole Gospel to the Whole World,” and sets forth twenty-one affirmations followed by twelve longer sections spelling out general convictions of the Lausanne II participants. The Manila Manifesto is an extension of the Lausanne Covenant, and the Executive Committee of LCWE, therefore, directed that it should never be published apart from the Lausanne Covenant.\textsuperscript{142}

The twenty-one affirmations which open the Manila Manifesto are brief, one-line sentences, each of which endorses a basic tenet of evangelical Christianity, especially as it pertains to evangelism. This important section of the document opens with a recommitment to the Lausanne Covenant as the basis for cooperation in the Lausanne Movement.\textsuperscript{143} The affirmations next discuss common Evangelical Protestant themes: the authority of the Bible as the Word of God and the sinfulness of humans.\textsuperscript{144} The brevity of all of the affirmations is worth noting. While brevity lends

\textsuperscript{141} Manila Manifesto, in \textit{New Directions in Mission}, supra note 12, at 292-305 ["Manila Manifesto"].

\textsuperscript{142} Jan van Butselaar criticizes Manila for trying simply to reinforce the Lausanne Covenant without taking into account the intervening years and the fact that the “goals” of Lausanne had not been achieved. See Jan van Butselaar, \textit{Thinking Locally, Acting Globally: The Ecumenical Movement in the New Era}, 81 INT’L REV. MISSION 369, 369-69 (July 1992).

\textsuperscript{143} Manila Manifesto, supra note 141, at 292-305, Aff. 1.

\textsuperscript{144} Id. Affs. 2-4.
itself more readily to agreement among various evangelical groups, this brevity does not clarify the issues as much as one would like for analytical purposes. As in the Catholic documents, the opaqueness is both beneficial and detrimental because it leads to multiple possible interpretations.

Significantly, the seventh affirmation states: "[w]e affirm that other religions and ideologies are not alternative paths to God, and that human spirituality, if unredeemed by Christ, leads not to God but to judgment, for Christ is the only way." The uniqueness of Christ is claimed as the basis for missions by the evangelicals. This is important because implicit in the above statement is a rejection of interreligious dialogue as advantageous for salvation purposes. Claiming Christ as the only way to salvation provides a clear rationale for missions. However, simply claiming Christ as the only way does not eliminate all problems for evangelism. First, there is still the question of who should be evangelized? That is, who is already saved and thus does not need to hear the Gospel message? If the message is preached to such persons, is it proselytism? Second, claiming Christ's uniqueness for salvation opens the door to charges of insensitivity and illegitimate proselytism from non-Christian groups.

Every member of the Church, clergy and laity alike, must fulfill the task of evangelism. The call for involvement in evangelism by all members of the Church mirrors and highlights the fact that members of the Body of Christ must transcend all barriers which might arise, including race, gender, class, and others. This transcending of barriers results in a community that is not divided by internal strife, but is united through holiness and love, and works coop-
eratively to evangelize people throughout the whole world who are not yet Christians.\textsuperscript{149}

The twenty-one affirmations also consider socio-political issues. The \textit{Manila Manifesto} strongly endorses themes of preservation of human dignity,\textsuperscript{150} the rule of justice and peace,\textsuperscript{151} and the preservation and advancement of religious and political freedom.\textsuperscript{152} The evangelicals’ verbal commitment to these issues is an important step, especially in light of the tension and disagreements among some members of the evangelical community regarding the appropriate level of social involvement and political activity. This verbal endorsement is a clear step in the direction of human rights.

Twelve general sections follow the affirmations, discussing in more detail some of the points set forth in the affirmations. These twelve sections are much longer, as each contains four to eight paragraphs. The first of these sections, titled "The Human Predicament," elaborates on several human rights issues. "Men and women have an intrinsic dignity and worth, because they were created in God’s likeness to know, love and serve him."\textsuperscript{153} Evangelicals are advocates of human rights because of their belief in God as a creator who imbues humans with worth and dignity simply by creating them in God’s likeness. Unfortunately, sin has distorted every part of every person. It is thus sin which causes people to violate the inherent rights of others and to disrespect their dignity and freedom. The \textit{Manila Manifesto} condemns all violations and disrespect for human rights, but asserts that the only way to secure true freedom and human rights is for people to accept the love and forgiveness of God.\textsuperscript{154}

\textsuperscript{149} \textit{Id.} Affs. 17, 19, 21.
\textsuperscript{150} \textit{Id.} Aff. 8.
\textsuperscript{151} \textit{Id.} Aff. 9.
\textsuperscript{152} \textit{Id.} Aff. 20.
\textsuperscript{153} \textit{Id.} q.A.1.
\textsuperscript{154} \textit{Id.}
Because evangelism in and of itself necessitates a rejection of those things that are incompatible with the Kingdom of God, evangelism is primarily the proclamation of God’s kingdom. Thus, the Manila Manifesto rejects a number of things in the world that it views as sinful and out of line with the Kingdom of God, including “destructive violence, including institutionalized violence, political corruption, all forms of exploitation of people and of the earth, the undermining of the family, abortion on demand, the drug traffic, and the abuse of human rights.” The ire of evangelicals increases when the issues concerning the debt of the two-thirds world is raised, or when the subject of the inhuman living conditions of many people in the world is broached. Those adhering to the Manila Manifesto believe that a commitment to justice and peace necessarily accompanies any legitimate evangelism, for “good news and good works are inseparable.” Again, though, there is a clear distinction between social action and evangelism, since the Lausanne Covenant undergirds all of this and states that evangelism and social action are not interchangeable.

The Manila Manifesto turns to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights for guidance on religious freedom, advocating the freedom to “profess, practice, and propagate” religion. Evangelicals do not desire freedom only for Christianity, but seek freedom of religion for all people. This means that Christians are seeking no more religious freedom than they desire to give. This freedom of religion has limits, however. All “unworthy methods of evangelism” are denounced. Even though Christians desire to share their faith with others, the practice should be “to make an open and honest statement of it, which leaves the hearers en-

185 Id. ¶ A.4 (citation omitted).
186 The phrase “two-thirds world” is used in the Manila Manifesto to refer to what is sometimes called the “Third World.” According to M.R. Spindler (supra note 12, at 200), “the new name Two Thirds World still evokes the idea of the ‘Third World’ but with the critical hint at the demographic and geographic superiority of this part of the commonwealth of nations.”
187 Manila Manifesto, supra note 141, ¶ A.4 (citation omitted).
tirely free to make up their own minds about it." Therefore, any evangelistic approach which "seeks to force conversion" on any nonbeliever is rejected.\textsuperscript{158} While unworthy methods are denounced, though, there is no clear delineation of precisely what forms of evangelism are approved and what are not. The only hint given is the statement that any method which seeks to "force conversion" is unworthy.

The \textit{Manila Manifesto} categorically rejects religious beliefs that are in opposition to the core beliefs asserted by evangelicals, and even rejects any beliefs that are relativistic or syncretistic: "We also reject half-gospels, which minimize sin and confuse God's grace with human self-effort."\textsuperscript{159} Because Christ is unique and all-sufficient, any claim that salvation is possible outside Christ or "apart from an explicit acceptance of his work through faith" is unmerited and false.\textsuperscript{160} The implications of this statement are that the Jewish people must be evangelized and converted to belief in Christ to be saved. Also, people of \textit{all} religions other than Christianity must be evangelized, since they are outside of God's salvation. The \textit{Manila Manifesto} is not clear concerning what evangelicals believe about nonevangelical groups which profess a belief in Christ, but it appears that \textit{everyone} who does not fit the evangelical definition of a "Christian" needs to be evangelized and converted.

It is precisely on this point that criticism of evangelicals often becomes most severe and most warranted. The critique is that evangelicals define who is a Christian too narrowly. The \textit{Manila Manifesto} states that any cooperation with Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches should occur in areas where "biblical truth is not compromised," but "common evangelism demands a common commitment to the biblical gospel."\textsuperscript{161} Further, while some evangelical

\textsuperscript{158} \textit{Id.} \S C.12 (footnote omitted).
\textsuperscript{159} \textit{Id.} \S A.1.
\textsuperscript{160} \textit{Id.} \S A.3.
\textsuperscript{161} \textit{Id.} \S B.9.
groups are members of the World Council of Churches, there are other groups that are not members. Even so, “all of us urge the World Council of Churches to adopt a consistent biblical understanding of evangelism.” This statement by itself makes clear that the evangelicals do not currently agree with the WCC’s understanding of evangelism. If these statements concerning the Catholics, Orthodox, and conciliar churches are taken at face value, it is not difficult to imagine how some evangelical churches could oppose those groups quite strongly. If this opposition is grounded in a belief that other groups are not “Christian” according to the evangelical definition, then other groups become appropriate candidates for evangelization. Skirmishes often erupt over this fine line between proselytism and evangelism. The problem of proselytism is most acute in precisely this kind of situation.

In considering the beliefs held by evangelicals as a whole, the Manila Manifesto delineates four categories of people. The first category are the committed. This group of Christians comprises the potential missionary force; they number about 500 million people, according to this document. The second group are the uncommitted. This group has made a Christian profession at one time, but “the notion of a personal commitment to Christ is foreign to them.” This group needs to be “re-evangelized.” The third category of people are the unevangelized. These are people with a minimal knowledge of the Gospel, but who have not had a valid opportunity to respond to it. Finally, there are those who are unreached. This group comprises approximately 1/3 of the world’s population of six billion people. This last group is

---

162 Id.
not easily accessible to evangelizing Christians due to cultural differences and political inaccessibility.¹⁶⁴

The evangelical movement has made other statements over the years,¹⁶⁵ but none has carried the weight and prestige of the Lausanne Covenant and the Manila Manifesto. Thus, these two documents are the most accurate sources for undertaking an overview of evangelical views on missions.

In sum, the outstanding features of evangelical missiology are a strict definition of who is a Christian, a strong belief in mission/witness as proclamation rather than social action, and significant trust in the Bible as the lasting word in missions. These features are nonnegotiables for evangelicals, who believe that the decision to become a Christian is primarily an individual that involves a change of heart and mind. Evangelicals find the commission and command in scripture to go into all the world and tell the good news of Jesus. Therefore, those who are not Christians need to have the opportunity to make their own decision based on a fair presentation of the gospel message. Non-Christians exist in every nation and state of the world, according to the evangelicals, and Christians have a duty to spread the gospel.

However, evangelicals have precious little to say (in their consensus documents) about proper missionary techniques. Since they lack a principle of interreligious dialogue, they are much more susceptible to charges of proselytism. Without clearly stating what activities are licit and illicit for evangelism, evangelicals leave the door open to such charges. This problem is exacerbated if evangelicals adhere to a narrow definition of a Christian and consider nominal adherents of other Christian faiths (especially Catholicism and Orthodoxy) candidates for evangelism.

¹⁶⁴ Manila Manifesto, supra note 141, ¶ C.11.
¹⁶⁵ For examples, see supra note 140.
III. CONCILIAR ECUMENICAL

In 1948, the World Council of Churches (WCC) was founded, and the modern ecumenical movement began. The term "conciliar ecumenical" designates the movement by churches and related mission agencies that consider organized church councils the best visible expression of Christian unity. Though membership in organized church councils is by no means a prerequisite to a claim of ecumenism, such membership, for many individuals and churches, is the best way to demonstrate ecumenical concerns.

The World Council of Churches currently has over 300 member churches with a presence on six continents. The common confession of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord and a commitment to the unity of the Church are the signifying marks of WCC members. The Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME), created in 1961, is the wing of the WCC devoted to missiological concerns. The CWME works closely with member churches (and, more recently, with nonmember churches) to develop appropriate missiological statements, to monitor evangelistic activities, and to convene international conferences missions and evangelism (most recently at Salvador, Bahia, Brazil in late November 1996). Statements produced and promulgated by the CWME and WCC do not carry authority on their own in the way that many Roman Catholic documents do. The WCC documents may be formally adopted by member churches, or they may only be read and studied by churches. Since the time of the late Anglican Archbishop William Temple, it is often said that ecumenical statements carry only as much authority as they are entitled to have by virtue of their innate wisdom. Even so, documents produced by the WCC and CWME are produced by diverse

166 NEW DIRECTIONS IN MISSION, supra note 12, at x.
groups of drafters and often win broad support across a number of denominations.

The WCC has various relationships with the other three Christian groups discussed in this Article. Eastern Orthodoxy has had an official staff liaison with the CWME since 1970, and since 1974 an advisory group of Orthodox theologians has met regularly to discuss WCC proposals and to give input into CWME and WCC statements and conferences. Some of the views and documentation from this advisory group will be explored in the separate section below dealing with Orthodoxy. It should be noted, though, that the various Orthodox churches are members of the WCC.168 The Roman Catholic Church is not officially a member of the WCC, but participates in CWME conferences and WCC assemblies. Further, a Joint Working Group of the Vatican Secretariat for Christian Unity and the CWME collaborate on documents and engage in frequent discussions.169 Some evangelical groups maintain membership in the WCC, while others do not. In the past ten years, though, the WCC and CWME have worked more closely with the Lausanne Movement170—especially through the report of the Stuttgart Consultation, which played an important role in both the CWME San Antonio conference (1989) and the Lausanne II Congress at Manila (1989). In fact, a number of evangelicals attended both of these congresses, which were only six weeks apart.171

---

168 See sources at infra note 226.
170 But see criticism of both the WCC and the Lausanne movement in responding to the “new era” in Butselaar, supra note 142.
A. Ecumenical Affirmation

The foremost document produced by WCC and the CWME regarding mission and evangelism is a 1982 statement, *Ecumenical Affirmation: Mission and Evangelism*. This document first began to take shape in 1976 when the WCC Central Committee asked the CWME to prepare a document containing the basic convictions of the ecumenical movement on mission and evangelism. This request came on the heels of the Fifth Assembly of the World Council of Churches at Nairobi (1975). CWME drafted a document which became a basis of conversations among Orthodox, Protestant, and Catholic groups. The draft underwent review at the CWME Melbourne Conference (1980). Finally, in July 1982, the WCC Central Committee gave formal approval to the final version of *Ecumenical Affirmation: Mission and Evangelism*. The finished product was published and widely distributed to member churches and nonmember churches alike for study, inspiration, and guidance. Overall, the document received a hearty reception and has enjoyed a long and influential life. This 1982 document is still the foundation for discussions concerning mission and evangelism in the conciliar ecumenical movement.

*Ecumenical Affirmation* opens with an exhortation and a call to mission and witness. This is followed by a series of seven sections containing convictions which are seen as normative for ecumenical missionary practice: conversion,

172 WCC CENTRAL COMMITTEE, *ECUMENICAL AFFIRMATION: MISSION AND EVANGELISM*, reprinted in 71 INT'L REV. MISSION 427-47 (Oct. 1982) ["ECUMENICAL AFFIRMATION"]. See also three "testimonies" (Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Protestant) that were given accompanying *Ecumenical Affirmation* when it was presented to the WCC Central Committee: Anastasios Yannoulatos, *All of us are in a Missionary Situation*; Basil Meeking, *For every human being in the world*; and Lois Miller, *Affluence and privilege are a stumbling block*, in 71 INT'L REV. MISSION (Oct. 1982) at 462, 454, and 456 respectively.

173 See NEW DIRECTIONS IN MISSION, supra note 12, at 36 (claiming that *Ecumenical Affirmation* "may be the single most important statement on mission [from any group] in this period [from 1974-91]").
the Gospel to all realms of life, the Church and its unity in God's mission, mission in Christ's way, good news to the poor, mission in and to six continents, and witness among people of living faiths. These seven sections are followed by a brief benedictory statement.

**Ecumenical Affirmation** focuses on the importance of ecumenicity and unity in mission. The unity is based on the common confession of Jesus Christ and his saving ministry. The unity of the Church is directly tied to evangelism, for ecumenism and evangelization are inextricably tied together. Witness will be ineffective if the Church is not united. Infighting and competition between Christian groups is detrimental to the overall portrait of Christianity as well as to individual witness.

While evangelicals emphasize the individual and the individual's relationship with God, **Ecumenical Affirmation** pays close attention to the life of the Church as a whole. Each individual becomes incorporated into the life of the Church when he or she commits to Christ. This incorporation is crucial in the life of the individual and in the life of the Church because Christianity outside the bounds of community in the Church, which is Christ's Body, does not exist. Receiving the message of Christ necessarily means becoming incorporated into the life of the Church.

Evangelism should continue until there is a church which confesses Jesus as Lord in every community in the world. "The building up of the Church in every place is essential to the Gospel." Every church is a cell of the larger body of the Church, and "mission calls for a serving church in every land, a church which is willing to be marked with the stigmata of the crucified and risen Lord." This emphasis on the worldwide, ecumenical Church is a unique characteris-

---

174 Ecumenical Affirmation, supra note 172, ¶ 1.
175 Id. ¶ 20.
176 Id. ¶ 25.
177 Id. ¶ 30.
tic of the conciliar ecumenical movement. One potential drawback of such a global emphasis is a lack of attention to the individuals who comprise the Church. While Ecumenical Affirmation alludes to individual personal relationships to some degree when discussing conversion, this factor is underemphasized.

Another drawback of this emphasis on the larger Church is that it does not address the problem of “nominal Christians” and exactly who is a member of this “larger church.” The Roman Catholic Church considers nominal Christians members of their church, and thus members of the larger church as well. Orthodoxy echoes this sentiment. However, evangelicals claim that nominal Christians are not members of any church, since they are not committed to Christ personally. This would render such persons candidates for evangelism, which in turn would be dubbed “proselytism” by Catholics and Orthodox. The conciliar ecumenical movement does not resolve this problem by speaking merely of “the larger church.” Therefore, some of the advantages of speaking about the larger ecumenical church are counterbalanced by problems of definition and specificity.

Just as the definition of a Christian is broad in Ecumenical Affirmation, the definitions of mission and evangelism are also broad. Although the proclamation that Jesus is the Christ is the starting point, a whole array of activities fall under the rubric of evangelism.

At the very heart of the Church’s vocation in this world is the proclamation of the kingdom of God inaugurated in Jesus the Lord, crucified and risen. Through its internal life of eucharistic worship, thanksgiving, intercessory prayer, through planning for mission and evangelism, through a daily lifestyle of solidarity with the poor, through advocacy even to confrontation with
the powers that oppress human beings, the churches are trying to fulfil this evangelistic vocation.179

While evangelicals place a primary emphasis on evangelism as proclamation, the conciliar ecumenical movement defines evangelism more broadly: Evangelism is announcing, denouncing, consoling, and celebrating. Christians are called to announce the Good News in Christ, forgiveness, and the hope that Jesus brings. Christians are called to denounce sin and injustice in the world. Christians are called to console the widows and orphans, to heal and restore the broken-hearted. Christians are called to celebrate life in the midst of death.180

This broader definition of evangelism, with a slightly decreased emphasis on proclamation, lends itself to a more socially active theology. One consequence of this theology is that conciliar ecumenical churches tend to be more willing to engage in social welfare activities without overt Christian proclamative witness. Evangelicals are more reticent to undertake such activities because of their view that proclamation is the primary method of evangelism, although social involvement is one of the Church’s duties.

For conciliar ecumenism, these many avenues of mission stem from the activities of the early Church. In the years soon after the life and death of Jesus, the Church witnessed in a variety of ways. The primary method of witness in the early Church was the lifestyle of the Christians. Persecutions also helped to spread the message. Finally, the Church organized purposeful ministries aimed at mission and evangelism, including the sending of Barnabas and Paul by the church at Antioch (Acts 13:1-4).181

The conciliar ecumenical movement also bases its missiological approach on the life of Jesus. Jesus manifested

179 Id. ¶ 6.
180 Id. ¶ 16.
181 Id. ¶ 4.
God's love for humanity in every aspect of his earthly life, whether healing, serving, preaching, or giving compassion. The Church is called to model Christ, sharing in the mediation of Christ between God and His Creation. This mediation by Christ and by the Church operates in two directions: from God to Creation and from Creation to God. The Church shows God's love for the world through word and deed, through identification with all humanity in solidarity, and through service and proclamation. Conversely, the Church "lifts up to God [all humanity's] pain and suffering, hope and aspiration, joy and thanksgiving in intercessory prayer and eucharistic worship."\(^{182}\)

To achieve its appropriate status as mediator, the Church must live in solidarity with humanity, identifying with the poverty of humankind. This solidarity is not an active participation in the sinfulness of humanity, but a solemn recognition of the overall state of humanity and the need of all people for God's salvation. This is especially true for the downtrodden, the marginalized, and the poor, who hold a special place in God's kingdom. **Ecumenical Affirmation** acknowledges a "preferential option for the poor," since proclamation of the Gospel among the poor is a "sign of the messianic kingdom and a criterion by which to judge the validity of our missionary engagement today."\(^{183}\)

The ultimate goal of solidarity and proclamation is conversion. One of the seven subsections of **Ecumenical Affirmation** is devoted to this topic. Even with this much attention given to conversion, the document is careful not to define, describe, or delimit conversion experiences because each person's conversion must be grounded in the concrete realities of their particular situation. Fundamentally, though, conversion is a process that "involves a turning from and a turning to."\(^{184}\) The proclamation of the Gospel

\(^{182}\) Id. ¶ 6.

\(^{183}\) Id. ¶¶ 32, 35.

\(^{184}\) Id. ¶ 12 (quoting Confessing Christ Today, Reports of Groups at a Consulta-
message includes an invitation to make this change through recognizing and accepting the saving lordship of Christ in a personal decision.\textsuperscript{185} The changes called for are concrete and specific: renouncing the domination of sin in one’s life and accepting the responsibilities of living in community and harmony.\textsuperscript{186} Once again, the theme of unity is central, for the call to conversion should begin with the repentance of the evangelizer.\textsuperscript{187} Repentance is necessary due to the lack of unity, community, and solidarity in the Church and in the life of the evangelizer.

\textit{Ecumenical Affirmation} affirms basic human dignity and the freedom of each person to profess and practice their own religious beliefs. Moreover, every person has the \textit{right} to hear the message of God’s salvation through Jesus Christ.\textsuperscript{188} Not only do other people have a right to hear the message of salvation, but Christians have a right and a duty to proclaim that message to every person on the earth. This right extends to all people in every country, regardless of the current law of any country.

\textit{Ecumenical Affirmation} does not limit its concern to religious rights and duties of individuals, but also focuses on the Church as a whole. Since life as a Christian necessarily entails association with a local church (which is part of the larger Church), conciliar ecumenicals claim the right and duty of the Church “to exist publicly—visibly—and to address itself openly to issues of human concern.”\textsuperscript{189} Although some countries assert pressure and try to restrict religion to the private sphere of the believer, the Church nevertheless claims its right to exist publicly and openly. This confessional identity is crucial to the Christian existence of individual believers and of the Church.

\textsuperscript{185} Id. \S 10.
\textsuperscript{186} Id. \S 11.
\textsuperscript{187} Id. \S 13.
\textsuperscript{188} Id. \S 10.
\textsuperscript{189} Id. \S 17.
Christians do not claim religious rights and freedom for themselves alone, but for all religions and faiths. Christians should work with other faith groups and religions to secure freedom of religion and conscience. All groups should be free to “maintain their institutional form and confessional identity in a society and to transmit their faith from one generation to another.”190 This religious freedom is at the heart of the many human rights freedoms and rights that the Church has an obligation to seek and secure. Through dialogue with civil authorities, the Church must work to found and procure communities of freedom, peace, and mutual respect. At their core, all of the basic rights claimed by humans are present in the kingdom of God which the Church preaches. “To proclaim the need to change from war to peace, from injustice to justice, from racism to solidarity, from hate to love is a witness rendered to Jesus Christ and to his kingdom.”191 Since the Church preaches that the kingdom of Christ is a present reality, the Church is obliged to work for those conditions which it believes are a part of that kingdom of God. Since the Good News of the Kingdom challenges even the structures of society,192 the Church should not be surprised when what it believes about the worth and dignity of each person is not respected by some societies or individuals. However, the Church must work to convert those societies or individuals so all persons may receive their due respect.193

Since mission and evangelism are patterned after the ministry and teaching of Jesus, all people should hear the Gospel. Jesus spoke with people of every age, class, and ethnic group. In the same way, the Church must be committed to God’s desire that every person have a chance to

190 Id. ¶ 41.
191 Id. ¶ 12.
192 Id. ¶ 14.
respond to the Good News of Christ. Jesus always acted in love and respect when dealing with people, even though he possessed the power and authority to act differently if he had chosen. Modeling our mission efforts after Christ, we are called to subordinate power to love, and authority to respect. *Ecumenical Affirmation* does not set forth a list of things in which churches may or may not engage when evangelizing, but it strongly asserts that whatever methodology is chosen for a given situation either “illustrates or betrays the Gospel we announce.”\(^{194}\) However individual churches or mission agencies choose to conduct their mission activities, all activities should be done in a spirit of love and respect. The document claims that “the sin of proselytism” is present even today among other Christian confessions, but it does not go on to spell this out in more detail at any point.\(^{195}\)

Since “[t]rue witness follows Jesus Christ in respecting and affirming the uniqueness and freedom of others,”\(^{196}\) adherents of other faiths should be treated with the utmost dignity and respect, though Christian witness should still be rendered to all. The document is vague regarding believers of non-Christian religions, primarily because the member churches do not agree on how best to tackle the issue. The document simply affirms that salvation comes through Christ and witness must be given to adherents of other faiths.\(^{197}\)

In the process of witnessing to believers of other faiths, the document firmly asserts that genuine conversation and even partnership should occur. Rather insightfully, *Ecumenical Affirmation* points out that witness and authentic conversation can never be a one-way process, but must always be two-way.\(^{198}\) This interreligious dialogue (a phrase

\(^{194}\) *Ecumenical Affirmation*, supra note 172, ¶ 28.

\(^{195}\) Id. ¶ 39.

\(^{196}\) Id. ¶ 41.

\(^{197}\) Id. ¶ 42.

\(^{198}\) Id. ¶ 45.
never actually used in the document) allows Christians to become aware of the deepest concerns and convictions of their neighbors while simultaneously sharing their own faith.

A problem with these statements about witness is that Ecumenical Affirmation does not take the argument to its next logical step: if witness is a two-way process, then both sides must enter open-minded, with no ulterior motive of conversion, and both sides must enter the conversation willing to change their position. The document resists this, for Christians cannot enter into dialogue with non-Christians willing to alter their views about God and possessing no motive to convert the other person. The converse is true: Christians are not open-minded because they have already made up their minds; Christians are not willing to change their views about God because they believe them to be true; a Christian’s ultimate intention in talking with a non-Christian about Jesus is to convert that other person.

This position on interreligious dialogue introduces the same quandary faced by the Roman Catholic Church. While stressing the primacy of respect for other persons and their beliefs, the belief is maintained that the message of Christ should be preached to all. There is no easy resolution to this problem, but there is even less discussion or acknowledgment that the problem exists.

A similar problem recurs in the treatment of “nominal Christians.” Ecumenical Affirmation uses something close to this phrase when it calls people who are “nominal in their commitment” back to their prior faith and enthusiasm. Unfortunately, precisely who is a nominal Christian is undefined. One person’s definition of a solid commitment to Jesus Christ may not be adequate for another person or church. Such situations lead to the latter feeling that the

109 Id. Preface (“In a world where so many Christians are nominal in their commitment to Jesus Christ, how necessary it is to call them again to the fervour of their first love.”) (emphasis in original).
former is “nominal” and in need of evangelism. To brand a person a nominal Christian and evangelize him or her might well be perceived as proselytism.

Another problem is that the document never specifies who may or may not evangelize these persons who are nominal in their commitment to Christ. Are they the sole responsibility of the denominations to which they once belonged? What is the role of other Christian groups in response to these nominal Christians: are they merely to support the original churches or should they actively evangelize? Though *Ecumenical Affirmation* states that the churches everywhere are in missionary situations due to the growing secularism around the world,\(^\text{200}\) it does not delineate who may (or should) evangelize in a given place. Can only “indigenous churches” evangelize (or re-evangelize) in a given country, culture, or locale? If an area is truly secular, can other Christian groups evangelize there even if there is already a Christian church present that has been there longer? Do outside Christian groups have an *obligation* to help the existing group? What should the church look like in a given culture?

*Ecumenical Affirmation* uses the term “inculturation” to describe the process by which the Gospel is transmitted to people in a given situation in a specific culture. Inculturation is distinct from syncretism in that it does not mix parts of other religions with the Gospel message, but it does allow the universal message and salvation of Christ to become present and understandable in a particular cultural milieu. Once again, the document states that solidarity is the key, for it is in the struggle for peace, justice, and human rights that inculturation occurs. This will mean that churches in different cultures will have their own distinctive cultural marks, but will nevertheless be able to share the common

\(^{200}\) *Id.* ¶ 37.
confession of Christ as Lord. Inculturation is critical in retaining the dignity of the indigenous culture and people.

B. Other Documentation

Although now sixteen years old, Ecumenical Affirmation is still the core document in the WCC's repertoire on missions, evangelism, and proselytism. Though many consultations, conferences, and discussions have been held and sponsored by the WCC, none has yielded a comprehensive document to replace or substantially augment Ecumenical Affirmation.

However, a few other statements by the WCC merit brief mention. The same year Ecumenical Affirmation was released (1982), the WCC issued a major statement on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry. This statement of ecumenical convergence, the product of fifty years of discussion and study, conveys some missiological implications. Primary among these implications is a statement about the Eucharist: "The very celebration of the Eucharist is an instance of the Church's participation in God's mission to the world. This participation takes everyday form in the proclamation of the Gospel, service of the neighbour, and faithful presence in the world." The Eucharist is a primary way of proclaiming the inbreaking of the kingdom of God into the world. This, from the conciliar ecumenical perspective, is a form of mission.

\[^{201}\] Id. ¶ 26, 27.
\[^{202}\] For further comment on the relationship between Christ and culture, see the proceedings and comments of the November 1996 conference in Bahia, Salvador, Brasil, in Mission in the Twenty-First Century: Impulses from Salvador, 86 INT'L REV. MISSION (Jan./Apr. 1997).
\[^{204}\] Id. ¶ 25.
Moreover, baptism is a sign to the world that "humanity can be regenerated and liberated." Baptism also signifies the unity of the Church. This unity and liberation serve as a witness to non-Christians about the message of God, and to motivate Christians to further proclaim God’s salvation for all creation.

The CWME has convened two major conferences after the issuance of *Ecumenical Affirmation*: the first in San Antonio, Texas in 1989, the second in Salvador, Bahia, Brazil in 1996. In planning for the San Antonio conference, a conscious decision was made concerning the purpose of the conference: not to define the meaning of mission and evangelism (since *Ecumenical Affirmation* performed that task), but to respond actively in faith. Thus, the theme of the San Antonio conference was "Your Will be Done: Mission in Christ's Way."

No formal document akin to *Ecumenical Affirmation* was adopted by the delegates. The report of Section I, though, entitled *Turning to the Living God*, picks up some of the themes of *Ecumenical Affirmation* and emphasizes solidarity and unity in mission. The report addresses the topic of proselytism, saying that evangelism should not turn into "programmes for denominational aggrandizement." "We believe that any evangelism that does not promote good relationships with other Christians in the community must inevitably be called into question . . . All unhealthy competition in mission work should be avoided as constituting a

---

206 Id. ¶ 10.
207 Id. ¶ 6.
208 CWME had convened three conferences prior to *Ecumenical Affirmation*: Mexico City (1963), Bangkok (1973), and Melbourne (1980).
209 The official record of the conference is *THE SAN ANTONIO REPORT: YOUR WILL BE DONE: MISSION IN CHRIST'S WAY* (Frederick R. Wilson ed., 1990) ["THE SAN ANTONIO REPORT"].
210 Materials and reflections may be found in *Mission in the Twenty-First Century*, supra note 202.
211 *THE SAN ANTONIO REPORT*, supra note 208, at 5.
212 Id. at 29.
distorted form of mission.\textsuperscript{212} The document further notes that “faith communities may become ingrown and stagnant.”\textsuperscript{213} In such settings, other Christians may play a “catalytic role,” but they can only do so “if they identify with the local faith community and treat it with sensitivity, respect and integrity.”\textsuperscript{214} The document does not clearly delineate which faith groups are Christian and which are not, nor is “unhealthy competition in mission” further defined. But \textit{Turning to the Living God} does not claim that some lands are already evangelized and in no need of mission. “Everywhere the churches are in missionary situations,” since secularism is dominant even in historically Christian countries.\textsuperscript{215}

\textit{Turning to the Living God} addresses the issue of interreligious dialogue. “Witness” is said to invite dialogue, not to preclude it; witness presupposes a two-way relationship. In dialogue, Christians may find that “the God we know in Jesus Christ may encounter us also in the lives of our neighbors of other faiths.”\textsuperscript{216} At the same time, the document endorses the reality that “salvation is offered to the whole creation through Jesus Christ.”\textsuperscript{217} The tension between these two principles is openly admitted: “we appreciate this tension, and do not attempt to resolve it.”\textsuperscript{218}

The next CWME conference, held in Salvador, Bahia, Brazil, focused on the theme “Called to One Hope—The Gospel in Diverse Cultures.” The topic of proselytism was broached—and condemned.\textsuperscript{219} The ensuing “Acts of Commitment” from the conference state:

\textsuperscript{212} Id. at 29 (¶ 14) (citations omitted).
\textsuperscript{213} Id.
\textsuperscript{214} Id.
\textsuperscript{215} Id. at 29-31 (¶¶ 15-23).
\textsuperscript{216} Id. at 33 (¶ 28).
\textsuperscript{217} Id. at 33 (¶ 29) (citation omitted).
\textsuperscript{218} Id.
\textsuperscript{219} See the strong statements by Metropolitan Kirill in his address at Salvador, infra notes 288-304 and accompanying text.
[U]nethical forms of coercion and proselytism which neither recognize the integrity of the local churches nor are sensitive to local cultures... run counter to God's reconciling love in Christ. We therefore commit ourselves to promote common witness and to renounce proselytism and all forms of mission which destroy the unity of the body of Christ.²²⁰

The conference further stated that "[c]ompetitiveness is the surest way to undermine Christian mission."²²¹

The conference reiterated an affinity for interreligious dialogue,²²² and stressed a commitment to work for human rights. "We... commit ourselves to confronting and working to transform oppressive structures and dynamics in the churches and in society that ignore, desecrate, or assault the divine image in persons."²²³

While these supplementary documents amplify, to some degree, Ecumenical Affirmation, they neither displace nor surpass it. Unfortunately, neither Ecumenical Affirmation nor any of the other documents deals with the problem of proselytism in a sufficiently in-depth fashion. Though the practice is decried by the WCC and all its members, some churches (particularly Orthodox Churches) do not think the WCC has done enough to stop the practice.²²⁴ One problem is that the WCC has yet to define exactly what proselytism is. While "unhealthy competition" is proclaimed as "distorting" true witness, the limits of healthy versus unhealthy competition are not clearly demarcated.

The lack of definition of proselytism is exacerbated by the lack of definition of who is a Christian. As a body, the WCC

²²¹ Conference Message, reprinted in 86 INT'L REV. MISSION 7, 10 (Jan./Apr. 1997).
²²² Id. (Christians are "gaining a clearer and richer understanding of their own faith and helping to build a 'community of communities' to the benefit of all" through interreligious dialogue).
²²⁴ See infra text accompanying notes 307-14.
adheres to broad definitions of who is a Christian (a person who is part of the larger Church) and a broad definition of evangelism. This dovetails into their overall emphasis on ecumenism and unity. Two criticisms leveled against the WCC are: 1) that their definitional views are so broad that everyone is a Christian, or 2) that their views on interreligious dialogue render evangelism unnecessary. These seem to be unfair criticisms since the WCC and all its member churches admit the need for evangelism and mission. This admission in itself indicates that someone needs to be evangelized. The difficulty arises when we try to determine how and by what means that evangelism should occur.

IV. EASTERN ORTHODOXY

Like the Roman Catholic Church, Eastern Orthodoxy has a tradition that extends much farther back than any within Protestantism, whether evangelical or ecumenical. The Orthodox tradition is very important for Orthodox Christians and theologians. The sense of catholicity of the Orthodox Church is a stabilizing reference point, and the starting point, for Orthodox theology.

The Orthodox Church does not have a hierarchy that operates as the Roman Catholic Church does. Orthodox churches are much more likely to take on the shape and characteristics of the culture in which they are practiced. The Orthodox churches are said to be autocephalous, yet they are connected in some fundamental ways. Orthodox churches share common theology and history, even though there are fewer authoritative statements. The head of the Orthodox church in a given country has authority and jurisdiction over the Orthodox church in that country, but does not have authority over other countries. The Orthodox Primates occasionally issue joint statements or hold conferences at the request of the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople (who is “first among equals”). Such joint state-
ments obviously carry substantial weight, though they are still not binding on the Church in the way Catholic Conciliari statements are.

A. Theological Bases for Mission

The Orthodox Church has probably the most developed theological basis for mission of the four Christian groups studied in this Article. Since 1973, representatives of Eastern Orthodox Churches have met regularly to discuss the theology and meaning of mission and evangelism within the Orthodox tradition. These talks also benefit the WCC, as the participants focus on appropriate Orthodox contributions to ecumenical views on mission and evangelism. Professor Ion Bria has collected and compiled essays from a number of these meetings of the Orthodox Advisory Group to the WCC-CWME. This compilation, Go Forth in Peace: Orthodox Perspectives in Mission, is a very useful and provocative resource on Orthodox missiology. Although these essays and collected thoughts do not have authoritative value for the Orthodox churches, they are an accurate com-

But of JAMES J. STAMOULIS, EASTERN ORTHODOX MISSION THEOLOGY TODAY 49 (1986) (who contends that Orthodox missiology has not been systematically developed, even though much has been said by Orthodox theologians on the topic). Though Orthodox theology, overall, is not systematic, a lack of systematization is no proof of a lack of development, in my view.


pilation and expression of recent Orthodox reflections on missions and evangelism.

On a fundamental level, the Orthodox concept of mission is grounded in trinitarian theology. Trinitarian theology points to the fact that "God is in God's own self a life of communion and that God's involvement in history aims at drawing humanity and creation in general into this communion with God's very life."227 Resting on this basis, mission does not aim primarily at transmission of moral and intellectual convictions and truths, but at the incorporation of persons into the communion that exists in God and in the Church.228

An important building block in this trinitarian concept is the notion of the kingdom of God. This kingdom is not only a heavenly kingdom where intimate communion with God will occur forever, but also a kingdom that begins now. The Church is the place where the kingdom breaks into this present age, through the power of the Holy Spirit. The mission of the Church cannot bring about the kingdom; the Church can only announce the kingdom through the kerygma of the resurrection and live and witness the reality of the first-fruits of the kingdom in a sacramental way.229 The Church's task, then, is to mediate to the world what life in Christ is like. It achieves this primarily through living out a communal life in Christ—both as individuals and as a corporate body.

The first step in mediating this life in Christ is for those involved in mission (the whole church) to come to repentance and to lives of renewed faith and community within the body of Christ.230 It would be incorrect to relegate the

227 Go Forth in Peace, supra note 226, at 3.
228 See Stamoolis, supra note 225, at 87 ("[T]he motivation for mission is found in communion with God, the high point of which, for the Church as a corporate body, is its worship of God.").
229 Go Forth in Peace, supra note 226, at 6.
230 Id. at 9.
concept of "mission" merely to proclamation by individuals. Mission takes place in struggle, both individually and corporately, and implies a conversion into a "new creation." "This is not a fight that manifests itself simply in the souls of individuals; it permeates all of social life through injustice, oppression, etc., and even the whole of natural existence through sickness and death."  

An authentic understanding of the church comes only through fulfilling Jesus' command to "Go and make disciples of all nations."  The Orthodox belief as to how this is accomplished is quite broad. While claiming that mission is, by definition, "the proclamation of the good news, i.e. of the coming of the kingdom," Orthodox believers do not restrict this "proclamation of the coming of the kingdom" to verbal pronouncements. Proclamation of the kingdom as mission and witness comes primarily through liturgical worship and the Eucharist. "Although the Eucharist is the most perfect access to the economy of salvation, it is the goal—and also the springboard—of mission, rather than the means of mission." The Church's goal is to draw persons into communion with God and with other humans through the life of the Church. That goal is accomplished a number of ways, including when the Church lives the eucharistic life that God desires.  

---

231 Id. at 5.  
233 Id. at 17.  
234 Id. at 19. See also Alexander Schmemann (The Missionary Imperative in the Orthodox Tradition, in THEOLOGY OF CHRISTIAN MISSION (Gerald H. Anderson ed., 1961)), who states that "[n]othing reveals the relation between the Church as fullness and the Church as mission better than the Eucharist, the central act of the Church's liturgy], the sacrament of the Church itself... The Eucharist is always the End... and, yet, it is always the beginning, the starting point: now the mission begins."  
235 GO FORTH IN PEACE, supra note 226, at 23 ("Proclamation should not be taken in the narrow sense of an informative preaching of the truth, but rather of incorporating humanity into the mystical union with God.").
This eucharistic life focuses on “the humble and ‘kenotic’ hiding of the divine word in the mystery of the bread, offered, broken, and given,” but is not confined to an ecclesial setting.\textsuperscript{237} While “we proclaim his death and confess his resurrection until he comes again” through taking the bread in an ecclesial, communal setting, the truly eucharistic life does not end when the eucharistic assembly disperses. As Christians are sent out with the blessing “Go forth in peace,” those who have heard the word of God and have received the bread of life should be “living prophetic signs of the coming kingdom.”\textsuperscript{238} The dismissal of the faithful at the end of the liturgy does not mean that the liturgy and Eucharist have ended; rather, the liturgy and Eucharist are transformed and continue in the life of the faithful worshiper.\textsuperscript{239} This kind of liturgical and eucharistic life of a faithful believer produces the witness that God desires.

Orthodox Christians are careful to differentiate evangelistic witness from the whole mission of the Church. While the latter has many facets, evangelistic witness is expressed as “the communication of Christ to those who do not consider themselves Christian, wherever these people may be found.”\textsuperscript{240} Evangelistic witness includes the need of the Church to witness and minister to some of its own “nominal members.” Evangelistic witness is primarily a call to salvation, which means the restoration of the relationship with both God and humanity. Thus, the call to salvation calls humans to become truly human, relating to God and to their fellow humans in the way they were created to relate.

Evangelistic witness is required of Christians because the good news of God is for everyone. The ultimate goal of

\textsuperscript{237} Id. at 17.
\textsuperscript{238} Id. at 38-39.
\textsuperscript{239} Id. at 43; see also Ion Bria, The Liturgy After the Liturgy, reprinted in MARTYRIA/MISSION: THE WITNESS OF ORTHODOX CHURCHES TODAY 66-71 (Ion Bria ed., 1980).
\textsuperscript{240} GO FORTH IN PEACE, supra note 226, at 30.
evangelistic witness is conversion and baptism. Conversion is understood to mean an intentional and willful turning away from sin and death and turning to the true life found in God. Baptism is the reception of a new member into the life of community of the Church.241 Along with the ultimate goal of conversion and baptism, the Orthodox identify some intermediate goals of evangelistic witness: increasing love and dialogue between Christians and non-Christians; formulating the gospel message in the language and culture of the non-Christians; penetrating the structures of society; challenging the injustice in the world around us; challenging the values of the world.242 Achieving these intermediate goals creates an advancement of God’s kingdom here on earth, and it will also bolster the credibility of the witness and increase the receptivity of non-Christians to the goodness found only in the life in God.

Although conversion is one of the ultimate goals, conversion is not the determinative factor in deciding whether “mission” exists. Whether mission exists is not based on the number of “converts” or the statistical membership of a church, but instead rests upon the “holiness, unity, and catholicity” of the church.243 The goal of proclamation of the gospel, then, is to establish eucharistic communities in every place, each within their own context, culture, and language.244 These communities help usher in the kingdom of God in the present age.

Proselytism is denounced as outside the bounds of true evangelistic witness. While evangelistic witness seeks to demonstrate to the world the Orthodox faith as an “active presence,” proselytism is a corruption of Christian witness.

241 Id. at 31.
242 Id.
243 Id. at 12.
244 Stamoolis, supra note 225, asserts that the ultimate aim of mission is the glory of God (49), while an immediate aim of mission is planting of the church (52), with an emphasis on the use of both vernacular language (65) and indigenous clergy (68).
In proclaiming the gospel, the priest must “have proper respect for others, possess an integrity of character, and allow others to use their free will in coming to the Orthodox faith.” This further strengthens claims against all forms of coercion in the name of Christ, which leads only to “a desire for spiritual aggressiveness” and not to true faith. These documents do not elaborate further on a definition of proselytism, nor do they state which groups under which circumstances they consider to be practicing proselytism rather than true evangelism.

While the task of proclamation falls primarily to the priests, the laity are specifically charged with the work of evangelistic witness. The witness of the laity comes primarily through “the authentic Christian life to which every layperson is called.” Additionally, lay witness involves a “vital and living participation in the divine liturgy,” a personal witness of faith, and involvement in the social, political, and cultural life of his or her nation or society.

An important area in the realm of evangelism and proselytism is a consideration of the target of the evangelistic witness. For the Orthodox authors of Go Forth in Peace, evangelistic witness is “directed toward all of the [created order] that groans and travails in search of adoption and redemption (Rom. 8:22).” This means, first of all, that the church’s evangelistic witness is for “the Christian who is not a Christian.” The Orthodox define these people as those who have been baptized, but have not adhered to Christ, either deliberately or through indifference. Thus, the “re-Christianization of Christians” is an important part of the church’s evangelistic witness. Linked with these nominal Christians is the direction of evangelistic witness

---

246 Go Forth in Peace, supra note 226, at 32-33.
247 Id. at 33.
248 Id.
249 Id. at 33.
250 Id. at 34.
251 Id.
to those who superficially identify Orthodox Christianity with their national culture. Such a witness should touch even the smallest part of the national life and culture. The Orthodox Church acknowledges that nominal Christians exist in countries where Orthodoxy is the dominant religion, and asserts the need for evangelistic witness to these people. However, in this document, the Orthodox Church does not state its views on the role other Christian groups and churches can and should play in evangelistic witness to these nominal Christians. Other statements by Orthodox churches and the actions of various Orthodox churches clearly indicate that Orthodox Christians believe that the nominal Christians in Orthodox lands may only be evangelized by the Orthodox Church. However, if other Christian groups want to assist the Orthodox Church through prayers or financial support, that is welcomed. If other Christian groups offer "evangelistic witness" to these nominal Christians, the Orthodox Church calls it proselytism.

In addition to offering evangelistic witness to nominal Christians in Orthodox lands, Go Forth in Peace claims that witness is also directed toward the "new secularized humanity in an ever more secularized world." Secularized humanity includes those who are not in relationship and communion with God; they are trapped in the secular milieu that contains no ultimate goals for life, no forgiveness, no sacramental life, and no God. The Church has a duty to help bring the restorative message of Christ and the Trinity to such persons.

Finally, evangelistic witness must also be directed to the economic, political, and social structures of the world. This form of witness seeks justice for the poor and oppressed and speaks on their behalf. Through procuring and securing

---

1998] MISSION, EVANGELISM, AND PROSELYTISM 629

---

51 Id.
52 Id.
53 Id.
54 Id. at 35.
justice for the weak of the world, the Church is participating in the kingdom of God that is already present (at least partially) on earth and witnessing to God's love for all humanity.

The form evangelistic witness should take is not definitive. Although proclamation is one legitimate way of evangelistic witness, it is not (and should not be) the only way. In the current world, where the verbal announcement of Christ as Savior has already been spoken and garnered little response, the "first and chief method of evangelistic witness is the same as that of the early church. Those who saw the quality of life of those early believers were so attracted by its power and beauty that they sought to find its power and source." Thus, the first method of witness is the sharing of love with those around us. Obedience to God's will is also a powerful form of evangelistic witness.

Evangelistic witness is not to be limited to the personal sphere; it must also be made before the world's social and political realms. This means that Christians must seek justice for all people, regardless of age, gender, social standing, or race. The Church must spread the word of truth in various social settings, thereby providing a witness to nonbelievers.

The overall mission of the Church can be hindered in two ways, both of which relate to the influx of the world's values and systems into the Church. The first hindrance to the Church's missionary calling is a lack of connection to the trinitarian basis of communion. This occurs whenever a church is so divided or distorted that the true communal life that comes from God is no longer visible in the church. Lack of connection can also occur when mission efforts focus on individuals or "social realities of history" rather than using the Church as the reference point. Since the hall-

254 Id. at 36. See also Stamoolis, supra note 225, ch. 8 (describing this as an "incarnational" approach to mission).
255 GO FORTH IN PEACE, supra note 226, at 37.
mark of the Church, for the Orthodox believer, is that it is "one, holy, catholic, and apostolic," any division in the Church would detract from witness. Thus, from an Orthodox perspective, Christian groups that are "competing" for potential adherents would undermine the entire basis for mission, as well as the basis for the Church.

The second hindrance to the Church's missionary calling is the continued injustice and suffering of humans around the world. Christians cannot be true to their calling by sitting idly while other members of the human race are mistreated and abused. The Church must stand up against the violation of human dignity and stand for the basic principles of justice. The social involvement of the Church in the daily affairs of the world is critical to bringing to fruition the reality of the kingdom of God in our midst. Therefore, the churches have a God-given responsibility to work for justice and peace, for the development of peoples and nations, for the defense of human rights (freedoms of conscience, speech, and belief), and for the condemnation of violations of these rights. Only with the achievement of these basic human rights and freedoms can the reality of the kingdom of God among us be seen by non-Christians and Christians alike.

Go Forth in Peace was released in 1986. Since that time, Orthodox feelings toward the WCC and towards other

---

264 Stamoolis, supra note 225, at 104. A classic Orthodox text expresses it thus: "the unity of the Church is not imaginary or allegorical, but a true and substantial unity, such as is the unity of many members in a living body." ALEXIE STEFANOVICH KHOMIAKOV, THE CHURCH IS ONE (ENGLISH TRANSLATION FROM POLNOE SOBRANIE SOCHINEII (Complete Works)) Vol. II, 3 (1890).
265 Go Forth in Peace, supra note 226, at 13.
266 Id. at 50-51.
267 At the end of the book, the following three statements are taken directly from WCC consultations: Ecumenical convictions on mission and evangelism, in Go Forth in Peace, supra note 226, at 75 (excerpts from Mission and Evangelism: An Ecumenical Affirmation); The Eucharist: bread and wine for pilgrims on their apostolic journey, in Go Forth in Peace, supra note 226, at 92 (excerpts from Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry); Christian witness, common witness, in Go Forth in Peace, supra note 226, at 95 (excerpts from Common Witness, a study document of
churches (both within and without the ecumenical movement) have changed. This seems only natural given the many intervening circumstances, including the fall of communism, the independence gained by many Orthodox countries, and new state laws on freedom of religion, conscience, and belief. The Orthodox Churches have continued to hold consultations on mission at the behest of the WCC. Even in the midst of such discussions, though, the overall relationship between the Orthodox Churches and the World Council of Churches seems to be faltering. Even with changing times and relationships, understanding the theological framework for missions from the Orthodox perspective better enables one to comprehend and understand Orthodox responses to current situations.

More recent Orthodox statements reveal changed attitudes toward other churches, but also confirmation of the theological framework established in Go Forth in Peace. The following is an analysis of (A) a statement by the Primates of the Orthodox Church in 1992, (B) Orthodox Con-

---

the Joint Working Group of the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches). The reproduction of these WCC documents shows a high level of acceptance and adherence to these documents, even if the Orthodox Churches do not officially “adopt” the documents.

A document, not discussed below, that provides an excellent case study of the feelings of Orthodox Churches toward outside missions coming into their territory is THE MOTHER CHURCH AND ROMAN CATHOLIC MISSIONARY ACTIVITY IN A REBORN ARMENIA: DOCUMENTS PERTAINING TO THE ARMENIAN UNIAE PATRIARCHATE’S DESIGN TO PROSELYTIZE IN ARMENIA (1993) (containing the same material both in English and Armenian). Especially pertinent is the first document, A Fatherly Word Addressed to the Armenian People, 5-17 (in English), which states bluntly, “Armenia is not [a] mission field for Christian evangelization.” Id. at 9.

Andrei Zolotov, Georgian Orthodox Church to leave WCC and CEC, Ecumenical News International, ENI News Service, 26 May 1997 ["Georgian Church to leave WCC"]. See generally SABEV, supra note 226.

The Russian Orthodox Church currently has an initiative to take an all-Orthodox decision concerning problems involved in the participation of Orthodox Churches in the WCC to the WCC’s 7th General Assembly in Harare, Zimbabwe in December 1998. Decisions of the Holy Synod (2-3 October 1997) <http://www.russian-orthodox-church.org.ru/ne061071.htm>. For a theological exposition of the tensions Orthodoxy experiences within the WCC, see infra note 318 and accompanying text.
sultations on Mission held at the WCC’s request, culminating in (C) a speech delivered by Metropolitan Kirill of Smolensk and Kaliningrad at the WCC-CWME’s Conference on World Mission and Evangelism in Salvador, Brazil in late 1996. This is followed by (D) a look at possible cracks in Orthodox involvement in the ecumenical movement, and then (E) the recent position and statements of the Russian Orthodox Church, especially with regard to the new law “On Freedom of Conscience and on Religious Associations.”

B. 1992 Pan-Orthodox Statement

On March 13-15, 1992, Patriarchs and Archbishops heading the then fourteen regional Orthodox Churches convened at the headquarters of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Istanbul, Turkey. This was the first time in many years that the Patriarchs and Archbishops of so many Orthodox Churches were free to meet and express themselves under the leadership of the Ecumenical Patriarch. The Primates, headed by Bartholomew, Archbishop of Constantinople (designated “first among equals”), issued a joint message on the Sunday of Orthodoxy concerning a number of topics, including mission, evangelism, and proselytism. The Message carries substantial weight since it was signed by all of the fourteen Primates.

After an opening doxology and praise, the document addresses changes in the world and the response of the Church. These changes and their most distinct results are evident in the collapse of Communist systems in various countries. The Message claims that this collapse, coupled with the “failure of all anthropocentric ideologies,” has led to an existential insecurity which, in turn, has led many people “to seek salvation in new religions and para-religious

---

262 Message of the Primates of the Most Holy Orthodox Churches, 21 ECUMENICAL TRENDS 57 (Apr. 1992) (“Message of the Primates”).
movements, sects or nearly idolatrous attachments to the material values of this world. This has created a “deep crisis” in the contemporary world. Proselytism is a manifestation of this crisis, not a solution.

The document next discusses the need for unity in the Church and the role the Orthodox Church has played in seeking and securing ecumenism in recent years. The Primates express their disbelief concerning the recent activities by both Catholics and “certain Protestant fundamentalists.” The Orthodox Primates lament that these other “Christian” groups are not appropriately supporting the Orthodox Church in her important time. During the atheistic regimes that formerly ruled in many countries, the Orthodox Churches were suppressed, tormented, and even persecuted. Now that the oppressive regimes have ended, the Primates had expected a favorable reaction from other Christian groups. Instead, “to the detriment of the desired journey towards Christian unity, the traditional Orthodox countries have been considered ‘mission territories’ and thus, missionary networks are set up in them and proselytism is practiced with all the methods which have been condemned and rejected for decades by all Christians.”

The Primates perceive the Roman Catholic Church as acting contrary to the spirit of love and dialogue established at many ecumenical meetings and bilateral theological discussions. The Uniate churches are a particularly sore subject for the Orthodox hierarchs. The problem of Uniatism is so deep that any and all reconciliatory dialogue between the Catholics and the Orthodox is to remain focused on that single subject.

---

263 Id. ¶ 2.
264 Id.
265 Id. ¶ 4.
267 Though not mentioned explicitly in the document, the Primates are distressed that the Roman Catholic Church, without any discussion with leaders from Ortho-
The document reserves a second diatribe for the "Protestant fundamentalists who are eager ‘to preach’ in Orthodox countries which were under Communist regimes." These Protestant groups consider the former Communist countries as "terra missionis" (missionary lands). The Orthodox Church, comprising a clear majority in these countries, staunchly opposes consideration of their countries as terra missionis "since in these countries the Gospel has already been preached for many centuries." True mission, in the Orthodox sense of the term, is "carried out in non-Christian countries and among non-Christian peoples." This kind of mission is a sacred duty of the Church, and the Orthodox Church is involved in such mission activity in Asia and Africa (which must mean that the Primates consider those regions and peoples to be non-Christian).

Clearly, the Orthodox Church defines Christians very differently than the Protestants. For the Orthodox, the Church is community-centered, and Christians belong to the Church through baptism. For Protestants, Christians possess individual, personal relationships with God. Further, Protestants would argue that it makes no sense to speak of a land as "already Christian." These starkly different positions lead to problems of "proselytism."

doxy, appointed a number of new bishops for Ukraine, Romania, and Russia. The appointment of these bishops tends to confirm the Orthodox belief that Catholics maintain the idea that Eastern Europe and Russia are still in need of "conversion" to Roman Catholicism. See Thomas Fitzgerald, *Historic Meeting in Istanbul*, 21 ECUMENICAL TRENDS 49, 66 (Apr. 1992).

\[266\] *Message of the Primates*, supra note 262, ¶ 4.

\[267\] Id.

\[268\] Id.


\[270\] See *From the Editor*, 21 ECUMENICAL TRENDS 49, 50 (April 1992) ("It no longer makes sense to speak of a Catholic or Protestant or Orthodox nation, especially in light of Europe’s growing secularism"). See also discussion of the secularism of the world and assertion that all churches are in missionary situations in the WCC’s THE SAN ANTONIO REPORT, supra notes 208-16 and accompanying text.
The Message of the Primates vigorously denounces all forms of proselytism, which it distinguishes from evangelization and mission. The Primates say that proselytism is practiced in many nations which are already Christian, including Orthodox nations. Proselytism sometimes occurs through material enticement and sometimes by various forms of violence. Such proselytism “poisons the relations among Christians and destroys the road towards their unity.” The Primates say that their hearts are sensitive to such persons, but they do not list in this short document any tangible efforts they are making to secure this dignity, freedom, and development. The commitment of the Primates to the ecumenical movement and its social track is clear, though. Even with their stated misgivings about the ecumenical movement and about proselytism, the Primates make clear that their commitment to unity and ecumenicity is firm.

C. Orthodox Consultations on Mission

An ongoing series of consultations regarding mission and witness have been held under the auspices of the WCC. The first of these meetings after Message of the Primates was held at Chambéry, Switzerland in February 1993. This gathering of fifteen Orthodox, Roman Catholics, Protes-

---

273 Message of the Primates, supra note 262, ¶ 4.
274 Id. ¶ 7.
275 Id. ¶ 5.

The reflection paper affirms the importance of constructive dialogue among the Christian traditions regarding mission and proselytism. It yields a renewed recognition that "the commitment to evangelism is inseparable from the commitment to the unity of the Body of Christ." While differences in perspectives and views on evangelism remain, the gathering affirmed some of the Orthodox Church’s concerns as legitimate. The participants acknowledged that “[m]ission activity from outside ... invaded certain countries, particularly after the fall of communism.” While mission activity in itself is good, this particular "invasion" is wrong and harmful because the mission activity is occurring in places where the local church has existed for many centuries, namely in Orthodox countries.

Part of the increase in mission work in Orthodox countries stems from the new openness and religious freedom afforded by the new governments. The participants acknowledged the freedom of persons to change their religion or belief, while simultaneously stressing the need for accountability among Christian churches so that there is not competition in mission. The document states bluntly: "Religious freedom must not become a license to disregard and marginalize local churches but should rather be used to promote common witness." The *Message of the Primates* is affirmed in its condemnation of all forms of proselytism as outside the bounds of appropriate mission and evangelism.

---

277 Id. at 235.
278 Id. at 236.
279 Id.
Theologically, the document asserts the need for the communion of churches to correspond to the communion of the Triune God in diversity and unity.\(^{260}\) This is firmly grounded in Orthodox trinitarian theology. Quoting the Second Vatican Council, the document asserts, "[a]nother basis for our unity . . . is the recognition that all those who have received baptism in Christ are in real, though imperfect communion."\(^{261}\) The participants committed themselves to the mutual sharing of information, accountability, and collaboration. Through this they hoped to avoid competition in mission activities, proselytism, and the creation of duplicative churches and structures in regions where the church is already present.\(^{262}\) Finally, the assembly proposed a series of ten issues to the WCC for further reflection. The fifth issue was presented thus: "To ensure that no form of assistance to persons and churches is used to encourage a change in religious allegiance. Where such occurs, it must be condemned by all."\(^{263}\)

Following the meeting at Chambésy, an Orthodox Consultation on Mission and Proselytism was held two years later, in June 1995. This meeting was again organized by the World Council of Churches and took place at the Moscow Theological Academy in the Trinity-St. Sergius Monastery, Sergiev Posad, Russia. The Consultation was attended by members of the Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox Churches, with representatives of the Roman Catholic Church and United Methodist Church in Russia in attendance as observers. The stated purpose of the meeting was "to formulate an Orthodox understanding of mission and of the phenomenon of proselytism and also to find ways and means to react against proselytism."\(^{264}\) The Consultation produced a

\(^{260}\) Id. at 237.
\(^{261}\) Id. (citing Unitatis Redintegratio 3).
\(^{262}\) Id. at 238.
\(^{263}\) Id. at 239.
\(^{264}\) SERGEY POSAD, FINAL DOCUMENT, ORTHODOX CONSULTATION ON MISSION AND PROSELYTISM (June 26-29, 1995), Introduction.
document that specifically dealt with defining mission and proselytism from an Orthodox perspective and the relationship of common witness and religious freedom to those concepts.  

Theologically, the Final Document affirms the principles described in *Go Forth in Peace*. It begins by affirming the Orthodox understanding of mission as inherent in the nature of the Church. Orthodox commitment to mission grows out of a trinitarian understanding of the Father sending Christ in the Holy Spirit. As Christians, we are all called to share in Christ’s mission: “For this reason, our commitment to mission is inseparable from the search for visible unity of Christians in the Church—the Body of Christ.” Further, missionary work through witnessing is the task of all members of the Church, including the laity. The missionary work and witness is tied to the actualization of the kingdom of God in this world through the liturgy and sacramental life of the Church, especially in the Eucharist. Through witnessing in all areas of “social and cosmic life,” we fulfill God’s commands and help initiate the kingdom in the present age.  

Proselytism is distinguished from true mission: “Proselytism is the conversion of Christians from one confession to another through methods and means that contradict the spirit of Christian love and violate the freedom of the human person.” The practice of proselytism uses many different means to accomplish its goal, including “open preaching of one’s confession through mass media, public meetings in concert halls and stadiums, dissemination of literature, organizing print media, setting up parishes and dioceses, financing youth education, providing humanitarian aid accompanied by preaching one’s own

---

256 Id.
256 Id. § 1.
257 Id.
256 Id. § 2.
Church teaching, etc." The Orthodox participants expressed that proselytizing often uses misinformation based on assumed cultural, social, economic, or political superiority. "[Proselytism] alienates people from their local ecclesial and cultural tradition, whereas true mission assures an integration of the gospel into the national culture, thus inspiring it." Proselytism thus undermines ecumenism, particularly in Orthodox countries which have only recently been liberated from oppressive governments.

The participants at Sergiev Posad paid tribute to religious freedom, but insisted that it not be used as a legal justification for proselytism. Religious freedom is tied to respect for each person created by God. This respect carries over into relationships between Christians of different confessions. From the Orthodox perspective, freedom of religion necessarily means a view toward ecumenicity and excludes any Christian church from regarding traditionally Orthodox regions as "terra missionis."

Whenever possible, collaboration between various Christian organizations and confessions should occur. Such collaboration in the areas of social and charitable work, health care, and the promotion of human rights will increase the effectiveness of the overall Christian witness in the world. Churches must make every effort to come together in common witness to solve common problems.

Finally, the Orthodox Consultation on Mission and Proselytism submitted a list of recommendations, first to the Orthodox Churches, and then to the WCC. The Consultation recommended that the Orthodox Churches examine the causes for proselytism within their country, and eliminate those causes stemming from the weakness or ineffectiveness of the indigenous Orthodox church to minister ef-
ffectively. Orthodox Churches were also urged to take a more active role in missions, both on a practical level and on a scholarly level. Finally, Orthodox Churches were encouraged to share information regarding proselytism, new religious movements, and sects.

The Consultation also proposed that the WCC continue to study proselytism and renounce it among member churches. Orthodoxy's trinitarian theology and eucharistic understanding of the church were proposed as important items for consideration and adoption by the WCC in reconsidering its understanding of mission and evangelism. The Consultation further urged the WCC to organize a consultation and comprehensive study concerning the proselytism of the "so-called new religious movements and destructive cults." 293

In July 1996, the WCC organized another consultation, "Toward Common Witness," in Bossey, Switzerland, for the purpose of producing a document for contribution to the CWME conference in Salvador, Brazil in November/December 1996. Twenty-two representatives from sixteen countries attended this consultation. The representative from the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) was Ms. Helena Speranskaya, 294 who had also attended the Sergiev Posad consultation.

Ms. Speranskaya described the current situation in Russia and listed eight Christian groups which were "engaged in proselytism" in Russia: 1) the Roman Catholic Church; 2) major Protestant churches (Lutherans, Presbyterians, Methodists); 3) Korean churches from South Korea and the USA; 4) world and European missionary societies; 5) non-denominational missionary organizations (Campus Crusade for Christ, Ko-Mishn, etc.); 6) Pentecostal and charismatic movements; 7) free evangelists; and 8) electronic preach-

---

293 Id. § 5.
ers. She further asserted that religious freedom must not be used to justify proselytism.

Overall, the consultation did not come to any consensus regarding the following terms: mission, evangelism, proselytism, believer, inchurching, and other related terms. Further study was recommended on these terms and issues.

D. Speech by Metropolitan Kirill of Smolensk and Kaliningrad

At the recent WCC-CWME Conference on World Mission and Evangelism in Salvador, Brazil, Metropolitan Kirill of Smolensk and Kaliningrad delivered a message on the theme of the conference. The Conference was devoted to the theme “Called to One Hope—The Gospel in Diverse Cultures.” The speech was given November 25, 1996.

The speech by this prominent member of the Russian Orthodox Church hierarchy focused on three main subjects: one hope, the gospel in diverse cultures, and the problem of proselytism. The first two subjects of the speech are only tangentially related to the present inquiry, but still merit a brief word. The subject of one hope is addressed under the heading, “The mission of the church in today’s world.” Metropolitan Kirill elucidates the sequence of world expectations and events following the dismantling of the Communist states. The fall of the Soviet Union did not provide an end to all evil, but rather resulted in a very different set

---

196 Id.
197 Id. at 5.
198 Metropolitan Kirill is widely regarded as the second most powerful figure in the ROC, after only Patriarch Alexy II. See Michael Bordeaux, Glasnost and the Gospel: The Emergence of Religious Pluralism, in THE POLITICS OF RELIGION IN RUSSIA AND THE NEW STATES OF EURASIA 113, 120 (Michael Bordeaux ed., 1995).
200 Id.
of problems: a rise in crime, a shortage of money to pay for jobs already done, a fear of lack of food, and internal fighting in civil uprisings.\footnote{300}

Further commenting on the state of today’s world, Metropolitan Kirill harshly criticizes the “super-consumer” attitude of Western civilization and laments “the present crisis of human civilization.”\footnote{301} He calls for a reform, beginning with the spiritual and moral state of individuals. The object is not to dissuade Christian churches from seeking to secure civil rights and liberties and to eliminate injustices, but is to emphasize that “the spiritual and moral rebirth of humanity” must be primary for churches.\footnote{302}

The second section of the speech addresses the interaction between the gospel and culture. For the ROC, “it is the living Tradition of the universal church which guards the scriptural mystery of the incarnation against the invasion of ‘other gospels.’”\footnote{303} This is the criterion on which Christian acceptance or nonacceptance of a culture is based for the Orthodox. These “other gospels” are not defined in the speech, but the implication is that any improper syncretism and inappropriate interaction of gospel and local culture would constitute an “other gospel.”

Following a lengthy discussion about the state of the Russian Church in the Communist years through the 1988 millennium celebration of the baptism of Russia, the speech turns to the reasons for the fall of the totalitarian state. Metropolitan Kirill claims that though social processes played a role in the demise of the Communist state, the real cause was that the leaders of the country realized “that Christian faith was still alive among the people.”\footnote{304} Although the state had tried to eliminate religion and Chris-
tianity from the hearts, souls, and minds of the people, it was unsuccessful. "As a matter of fact, Russians who may never have gone to church or read anything about religion, and who almost certainly received no religious education at home, proved to be inwardly Christians." 306

Metropolitan Kirill claims that Russians remained "inwardly Christians" because of the influence of Russian culture. Russian culture had been saturated with Christianity in the centuries preceding the Communist regime, and, try as they might, Communists could not entirely eliminate Christianity from the prevailing culture. The Orthodox Church affirms culture as a "bearer of the message of Christ," but warns that culture must not "be used for tactical purposes." 307

The last third of the speech is a bitter diatribe against incursions by foreign missionaries. Metropolitan Kirill characterizes all of the missionaries who entered Russia following the fall of the Soviet Union as engaging in a "crusade . . . against the Russian Church," and states: "[i]n most cases the intention [of the missionaries] was not to preach Christ and the gospel, but to tear our faithful away from their traditional churches and recruit them into their own communities." 308 Missionaries may at first have believed they were dealing with non-Christian or atheistic communist people, but foreign missionaries should have soon learned that "our culture was formed by Christianity and . . . our Christianity survived through the blood of martyrs and confessors, through the courage of bishops, theologians and laypeople asserting their faith." 309 Metropolitan Kirill categorizes the activity of the foreign missionaries as "fighting with our church." 310 He says the missionaries "came from abroad with dollars," buying time on radio and

---

306 Id.
307 Id.
308 Id.
309 Id.
310 Id.
television and using “their financial resources to the utmost in order to buy people.” From the perspective of the ROC, efforts by non-Orthodox missionaries to convert Russians via the medium of television or radio is proselytism, and, in effect, is an attempt to “buy people.” Even humanitarian aid by foreign churches is suspect. “Proselytism is not some narrow religious activity generated by a wrong understanding of missionary tasks. Proselytism is the fact of invasion by another culture, even if Christian, but developing according to its own laws and having its own history and tradition.”

The actions by foreign missionaries, from the Russian Church’s vantage point, undermine the very basis of ecumenism, because “ecumenism and proselytism are incompatible.” “[I]ncompatible also are mission and spiritual enslavement, the preaching of Christ and violence to one’s conscience, the proclamation of the gospel and bribery.” By making such a harsh statement, the Metropolitan implies that the non-Orthodox missionaries are performing all of the latter actions, and not the former. These statements from Metropolitan Kirill clearly point to an undermining of ecumenism, since the ROC views all foreign mission activity as competitive and parallel. Metropolitan Kirill does propose a number of solutions to these problems.

First, the WCC is called upon to take up the problem of proselytism and to help avoid all further problems. Second, and most importantly, the way out of the situation

---

910 Id.
911 Id. (accusing foreign missionaries of using money for “so-called humanitarian aid and promises to send [Russians] abroad for study or rest”).
912 Id. See also Cecil M. Robeck, Jr., Mission and the Issue of Proselytism, 20 INT’L BULL. MISSIONARY RES. 2, 4 (1996) (“The Orthodox have essentially defined proselytism so broadly that any missionary or evangelistic activity undertaken by non-Orthodox within these countries is labeled illegitimate, and those who are active in such practices are frequently described as thieves.”).
913 Id. supra note 298.
914 Id.
915 Id.
“lies in basing mission on the fundamental principle of early Christian ecclesiology: the principle of local church.”

Adopting this principle would cede all control and responsibility for the people in a given locale to the local church. The local church then would be fully responsible before God for its people. From the Orthodox view, this principle would mean that all foreign missionaries would abandon their independent efforts in Russia and instead focus any attention given to Russia on the Orthodox Church. Support and aid could be given to the ROC so that she could carry out the mission responsibilities (if any exist in Russia, which is unclear in the speech), but the Orthodox Church would never be threatened by competition.

This proposal is based on the assumption that non-Orthodox missionaries in Russia are “ignoring the local church.” But if non-Orthodox Christians maintain a different definition of a Christian than the Orthodox Church holds, then the non-Orthodox missionaries can truthfully say that they are not ignoring the local church. By their definition, their activity would be appropriate mission activity provided they are not using truly forceful or coercive methods or inducements by promise of money or reward. Based upon a different definition of who is a Christian, non-Orthodox observers believe it is possible that Christian missions could occur in Russia (or other Orthodox countries) while the local church is still respected. So long as active members of the Orthodox Church are not being recruited and persuaded to change their religious affiliation, it is at least conceivable, on a theoretical level, that illegitimate proselytism is not occurring.

This is not to say that the Orthodox Church should sit passively by and allow anything to occur, or even that the Orthodox Church has weak arguments. The point is simply that the Orthodox Church and the non-Orthodox missionaries are not speaking about the same subject. Further

---

306 Id.
dialogue on some deeper issues of Christianity is required. Diatribe and polemic from either side is not the solution. The Orthodox Church should not write off every mission activity in their country as proselytism and as a violation of religious freedom. Non-Orthodox missionaries should not condemn the Orthodox Church as being noncommitted to missions and should not unfairly characterize the Orthodox Church as being fundamentally opposed to religious freedom.\textsuperscript{317} Accusations by either side are too often based on partial information and less than partial understanding.

E. \textit{Cracks in the Ecumenical Movement?}

Presently, Orthodox Churches are becoming increasingly disillusioned and dissatisfied with the ecumenical movement, and some of the non-Orthodox churches are becoming increasingly belligerent in their stance. If relations are not improved quickly, the ecumenical movement and possibly even religious freedom itself could falter.

Frequent concerns cited by the Orthodox Churches about the WCC are assertions of vague ecclesiological concepts and concerns about developments seen as "Western Protestantism" within the WCC. "Western Protestantism" includes such broad concepts as the ordination of women, the revision of Christian views on homosexuality, and the use of inclusive language for the Bible.\textsuperscript{318} However, these and

\textsuperscript{317} See Lesslie Newbigin, \textit{The Dialogue of Gospel and Culture: Reflections on the Conference on World Mission and Evangelism, Salvador, Bahia, Brazil,} 21 INT'L BULL. MISSIONARY RES. 50 (1997) (arguing that it is necessary to challenge the ROC to let go of the "old territorial principle that regards the presence on Russian soil of any form of Christianity other than its own as illegitimate," while at the same time contending that missionaries to Russia should learn from the ROC and the long and costly history it endured under communism).

\textsuperscript{318} The concern is expressed in \textit{Reflections of Orthodox Participants: Addressed to the Seventh Assembly of the World Council of Churches, Canberra, Australia 1991, reprinted in Orthodox Visions of Ecumenism, supra note 226, at 177. See also Alexander Schmemann, Moment of Truth for Orthodoxy, in Eastern Orthodoxy Theology: A Contemporary Reader} 203 (Daniel B. Clendenin ed., 1995); SABEV,
other discrepancies have long existed between the WCC and the Orthodox Churches. It appears, in fact, that the Orthodox Churches are becoming increasingly impatient with what they perceive as the WCC’s continuing inaction regarding proselytizing activities in traditional Orthodox countries by both nonmember and member churches.

None of the Orthodox Churches had ever withdrawn their membership from the WCC since joining in 1962.\textsuperscript{319} But on May 20, 1997, the Holy Synod of the Georgian Orthodox Autocephalous Church voted to leave the WCC (and also the Conference of European Churches (CEC), also based in Geneva).\textsuperscript{320} According to one advocate for withdrawal, the rationale had more to do with proselytizing than with theological disagreements.\textsuperscript{321} This move by the Georgian Church and the dissatisfaction within the Russian Church highlight the increasing unhappiness and tension that Orthodox Churches feel regarding the WCC and the ecumenical movement.

\section*{F. The Position of the Russian Orthodox Church}

The Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) has taken a particularly active role in promoting the new Russian Law “On Freedom of Conscience and on Religious Associations.”\textsuperscript{322} Seen in the overall context of Orthodoxy, and set against the backdrop of Orthodox theology and missiology, support for a law which restricts the rights of foreign religious bodies is not entirely surprising, since the Church is defined by

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{319} For a history of Orthodoxy within the WCC, see sources at supra note 226.
\item \textsuperscript{320} Georgian Orthodox Church to leave WCC, supra note 261. See also Georgian Orthodox Church Withdrawal from WCC Serious “But Not Exceptional” Says WCC General Secretary, WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES OFFICE OF COMMUNICATION (June 10, 1997). Available at http://wccx.wcc-coe.org/wccpress/97-27pre.html.
\item \textsuperscript{321} Georgian Church to leave WCC, supra note 261 (“People react not to the WCC, but to the proselytising activity that they confront on a daily basis.”).
\item \textsuperscript{322} 1997 Freedom of Conscience Law, supra note 18.
\end{itemize}
territorial terms and is characterized by its unity. Surprising though, is the vitriol with which the ROC exerts its views. Further, statements from the Moscow Patriarchate are not consistently grounded in Orthodox missiology. Lacking such grounding, the statements quickly become political assertions rather than legitimate theological objections.

In 1992, Patriarch Alexy II of Moscow and All Russia was already expressing sentiments of dismay toward the foreigners:

> When the territories of central and eastern Europe were opened for the public missionary endeavors and evangelism, the peoples rooted in millennial Orthodox traditions became objects of proselytism for numerous zealots calling themselves missionaries and preachers who came from outside to the new markets.... Of course, our people will also survive this invasion, as it survived even worse times of persecution and attacks from atheist propaganda.\(^{323}\)

The tone of the ROC has recently become even sharper. In March 1997, the Moscow Council of Bishops issued a statement condemning "the continuing proselytizing activity of Protestant false missionaries in Russia."\(^{324}\) The Council was further distressed about the growth of "pseudo-Christian and pseudo-religious sects," and troubled by the "anti-Orthodox campaign" being waged by these groups.\(^{325}\)

Similar sentiments were expressed by Patriarch Alexy II in an interview the same month: "It is necessary ... to defend

---

323 Patriarch Alexy II of Moscow and All Russia, Address at the Conference of European Churches (1992), reprinted in Volf, supra note 271, at 26.
325 Id.
the individual and society from the attack of pseudoreligions.\footnote{326}

Even more forceful and animated language has surrounded the discussion and adoption of the law “On Freedom of Conscience.” The ROC was involved in the evolution of the law from its inception.\footnote{327} Patriarch Alexy has stated that the law is necessary to protect the society “from spiritual corruption and to create a barrier to destructive sects and false missionaries.” The law, he states, is essential to whether “our Rus will preserve itself spiritually.”\footnote{328}

The Patriarch, in urging President Yeltsin to sign the law, spoke strongly against foreign missionaries, characterizing all of them as “pseudoreligious.” “[The law] takes serious precautions for protecting the individual and society from the destructive, pseudoreligious and pseudomissionary activity that has brought obvious harm to the spiritual and physical health of people, to the national integrity of our people, and to the stability and civic peace in Russia.”\footnote{329}

Following Yeltsin’s initial veto of the law,\footnote{330} the Patriarch argued strongly for the revival and acceptance of the law. He stated that the law “creates pre-conditions for the effective protection of both the individual and society against the arbitrary actions of destructive pseudo-religious cults and foreign false-missionaries.” Justification for the law,

\footnote{327} Lawrence A. Uzzell,of Keston Institute, Oxford, England, has the most comprehensive reporting on the history of the law. \textit{See Keston New Service} reports. \textit{See also} the documentary history at <http://www.stetson.edu/~psteeyes/relnews>.
\footnote{328} \textit{Sermon by Patriarch Alexis II at Consecration} (Paul D. Steeves trans.) (Aug. 6, 1997) <http://www.stetson.edu/~psteeyes/relnews/9708.html#21>.
\footnote{329} Letter from Patriarch Alexy II of Moscow and All Russia to President Boris Yeltsin (July 17, 1997) (also signed by 49 bishops of the Russian Church, including the Holy Synod). Available at <http://www.stetson.edu/~psteeyes/relnews/9707.html>.
\footnote{330} Letter from Boris Yeltsin to Patriarch Alexy II of Moscow and All Russia (July 23, 1997) (detailing reasons for vetoing the law—as contrary to Russia’s constitutions and her international agreements.)
according to the Patriarch, is further grounded in the fact that "almost all the society" has recognized the need for the law.\footnote{Patriarch Alexy II of Moscow and All Russia. Statement on the situation that has developed around the Bill of Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations. Available at <http://www.stetson.edu/~psteeves/relnews/9707.html#31a>.}

Underlying all these statements is the notion that the Russian people are not candidates for evangelism by any but the ROC. Metropolitan Kirill clearly articulates this in his statement. He states that parishioners of the ROC were "taken away by force" during the Communist era.\footnote{Interview by Maxim Shevchenko with Metropolitan Kirill of Smolensk and Kaliningrad, NEZAVISIMAIA GAZETA, (Nov. 28, 1996). Available at <http://www.stetson.stetson.edu/~psteeves/relnews/kirill2811eng.html>.} Thus, the ROC has the right to bring back to itself those who were taken away: "These people should be in our fold. It is a historical falsehood [to assert] that they were [never] there. And those who conduct proselytizing work against us indulge this falsehood."\footnote{Id.} Here, the Metropolitan is making a broader assertion than is present in general Orthodox theology. Not only does he claim those nominal Christians in Russia as within the sole jurisdiction of the ROC, but he also claims sole jurisdiction of all Russians who are not members of the Orthodox Church.

By characterizing all groups, including foreign Christian missionaries, as pseudoreligions and sects, as false-missionaries and proselytizers, the Moscow Patriarchate has succeeded in vilifying all missionaries, not just illegitimate groups. However, from the view of the ROC, increasingly, all groups evangelizing in Russia are, by their very presence, engaging in proselytism and are thus illegitimate. Not only does this assertion run counter to international human rights norms, it runs counter to the theology of the ROC itself. This is a movement away from traditional Orthodox theology and toward a defensive, nationalistic stance.
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This Article has shown that the problem of proselytism is not simply a legal issue—it is also a theological issue. The problem of proselytism is not limited to methods of persuasion and conversion; it grows out of the differing theologies of religious groups. In the case of Christianity, the theologies and missiologies differ among the four major segments of Christianity.

The Roman Catholic Church has written much on the subject of mission and evangelism. Catholics view the Church as missionary by its very nature, stemming from the missionary nature of God. The mission of the Church should be carried out through both proclamation and social action, including solidarity with the poor and oppressed. The Eucharist also serves a missionary purpose. Other religions are respected by the Catholic Church, partly because those religions possess “seeds of the Word.” People should be called to come to God, but they should always be free to make their own decisions. Proselytism is condemned, but is undefined. The unity of the Church is emphasized, as all baptized persons are called to be together in one flock.

The Catholic documents tend to be rather opaque and lack specificity. While this affords some flexibility in interpretation, the lack of specific definitions of such terms as proselytism, nominal Christians, missionary lands, and appropriate methods of evangelism leaves much to be desired. The Catholic Church’s definition of a Christian is quite broad, encompassing all those who have been baptized, even if they are not currently practicing. This definition engenders criticism from many Protestant groups, who believe that Christianity involves a personal commitment. A further criticism of the Catholic Church is that by ceding as much as they do to other religions, they are compromising the uniqueness of the Christian message. Catholics would disagree and contend that salvation still comes through Christ alone, though not through only one method
of salvation. However, such an assertion requires a firmer basis and rationale for missions than appears in official documents.

Evangelical Protestants can be characterized by looking at the Lausanne Movement. Evangelicals believe in the primacy of proclamation in evangelism. The rationale for evangelism stems from the Biblical commands of Jesus, and from a conviction that those outside the Church are lost. While persons of other religions should be respected, they need the truth of the distinctive Christian message. Evangelicals believe that Christianity involves a personal decision and a commitment to follow Christ. Unworthy methods of evangelism are denounced, but not spelled out clearly. Persons should be free to hear and respond to the Christian invitation.

Like the Catholic documents, the Evangelical documents lack sufficient specificity. While this allows individual denominations to craft their own specific missionary guidelines, it also leaves open the possibility that evangelical missionaries will not practice appropriate methods of evangelism. Evangelicals do not provide a mechanism for inter-religious dialogue, and consider nominal Christians as appropriate candidates for evangelism. By defining who is a Christian in a narrow fashion, evangelicals provoke charges of proselytism. A further criticism is that by focusing on the proclamative aspect of evangelism, evangelicals neglect the social and cultural situation of those being evangelized.

The conciliar ecumenical movement, as seen in WCC documents, promotes unity in the churches as primary. Thus, competitive churches are viewed as unhealthy and detrimental to Christian witness. Unfortunately, no clear delineation is set forth concerning what constitutes competition among churches, for no firm definition of a Christian can be agreed upon. Ecumenicals emphasize all aspects of evangelism, including solidarity with humanity, especially the poor, and working for justice in the world. Respecting
human dignity as primary, ecumenicals both encourage local churches to retain their own cultural identities and to foster interreligious dialogue. Proselytism is denounced and religious liberty advanced, but only the latter term is given clear definition.

The WCC documents make more ambitious attempts at defining and delimiting terms associated with evangelism than Catholics or evangelicals, but still fall short of complete definition. There is no definition of nominal Christians, nor a detailing of who is to evangelize them if they are to be evangelized at all. No single definition of proselytism is agreed upon. No set definition of a Christian is given, and what is implied is a quite broad definition. This raises concerns from the evangelicals' perspective, who further claim that overemphasis on the unity and ecumenicity of the church can lead to a lack of attention given to the individual believer. A further criticism is the same as that leveled against the Catholics—that by entertaining the possibility of interreligious dialogue, ecumenicals are compromising the uniqueness and sufficiency of Jesus Christ.

Eastern Orthodox churches ground the concept of mission in the trinitarian nature of God. The Church is primarily a place of communion, and life in God is that of communion. Unity of the Church is crucial, as it evidences community in God. The missionary task of the Church is to mediate and model to the world what life in God is like. Thus, eucharistic celebration and a commitment to unity are more important than proclamation. Orthodoxy closely associates Christianity with culture, retaining cultural and national lines as imaginary boundaries within which only one local church should operate. All those who have been baptized into the Church are considered members of the Orthodox Church. No mention is made of nominal Christians, though the tacit understanding is that only the Orthodox Church has the right to evangelize (or re-evangelize) these persons.
The situation surrounding the new Russian law "On Freedom of Conscience and on Religious Associations" is understood much better if it is contextualized within this theological framework. The law is not merely an invention of bureaucrats to suppress foreigners and support a nationalistic programme. Neither is the purpose of the law merely to regulate non-Christian sects. Rather, there are theological reasons underlying the law's passage which are grounded in the theology of Orthodoxy.

This is not to condone the law as it stands, but rather to help understand it. Some of the feelings of the ROC are legitimate.\textsuperscript{334} The Church was oppressed under the Communist regime. Its parishioners were taken away. Its priests were murdered. Its buildings were confiscated. Its funds, spiritual and material, were virtually depleted. Then, after the fall of communism, the ROC found itself having to compete with foreign, non-Orthodox Christians within Russia. As the ROC explains it, the ROC was in a weakened position and has had difficulty alongside these new missionaries.

However, the situation is more complex than that. The stated arguments of the ROC concerning proselytism often do not get to the heart of the issue. The theological understanding of Orthodoxy differs radically from prevailing Western theologies. Russian Orthodoxy considers the entire Russian people to be Christian, to be Russian Orthodox. Russian Orthodoxy considers Christianity something into which a person is baptized at birth; that person is subsequently a permanent church member. Russian Orthodoxy views interreligious competition and parallel Christian structures as fundamentally un-Christian, and contrary to what it means to be the Church and to witness to the world. They call such competition "proselytism."

\textsuperscript{334} For a documentary history of how churches fared under the Soviet state, see Felix Corley, Religion in the Soviet Union: An Archival Reader (1996).
These positions contrast sharply with the views of many non-Orthodox Christians—especially evangelicals. Evangelicals view Christianity as a personal decision, not a cultural, communal existence. Evangelicals view proclamation as the primary method of evangelism, not witness through the Eucharist nor only social action. Evangelicals view nominal Christians, of any denomination, as ripe for evangelism. Evangelicals view Russia, as they view every nation, as a land in need of evangelism.

It is no wonder that evangelicals are among the groups with whom the ROC has the most disagreement and competition. Truly, "[o]ne group's evangelization is another group's proselytism."335 In situations such as the one in Russia, we would be wise to remember that human rights law cannot provide all of the answers when theology is so deeply implicated.

While legal dialogue must occur, so too must theological dialogue. While non-Orthodox Christians can learn much from the Orthodox Church's theology and her consistent witness through years of persecution under communism, the Orthodox Church would do well to consider carefully the various theologies and missiologies held by her sister Christian churches—and to reconsider the depths of her own theology.336 Those theologies and missiologies contain resources for discussing and coping with issues of evangelism and proselytism in different and, arguably, more appropriate ways.

335 Robeck, supra note 312, at 2.
336 See Newbigin, supra note 317, at 51.