

## Ecumenical Pilgrimage toward World Christianity

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### Abstract

Although the modern ecumenical movement has existed for more than a century, the Roman Catholic Church's involvement began only some 50 years later. In fact, 2014 commemorates only the 50th anniversary of the promulgation of *Unitas redintegratio*, Vatican II's Decree on Ecumenism. This article traces the ecumenical movement from its beginnings, focusing on the contributions of the World Council of Churches and the progress made by Roman Catholicism. It concludes by pointing to issues which World Christianity is exploring as the ecumenical agenda for the 21st century.

### Keywords

ecumenism, Edinburgh 1910, Faith and Order, modern ecumenical movement, receptive ecumenism, Pentecostals, Second Vatican Council, Southern Christianity, triple dialogue, *Unitatis redintegratio*, World Christianity, World Council of Churches

Any exploration of ecumenism in the contemporary world must necessarily engage the contributions of the World Council of Churches (WCC). In fact, the WCC regards itself as “the broadest and most inclusive among the many organized expressions of the modern ecumenical movement.”<sup>1</sup> Elsewhere, it is even described

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1. WCC, “About us,” <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/about-us>. (All URLs referenced herein were accessed March 17, 2015.)

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as the “privileged instrument” of the ecumenical movement since “no other ecumenical expression of the church is as comprehensive in its constituency, the breadth of the issues addressed, and the network of relationships it fosters across ecclesial traditions, plurality of cultures, political ideologies, and nationalities.”<sup>2</sup>

The WCC’s most recent assembly, held October 30 to November 8, 2013, in Busan, Republic of Korea, is the impetus for this article. The yearlong preparation of delegates in the various continents and local churches for this 10th Assembly of the WCC was guided by a six-unit resource entitled *Pilgrimage to Busan: An Ecumenical Journey into World Christianity*.<sup>3</sup> The resource was produced to assist the Christians of the member churches in exploring the themes of the assembly and to discover what it means to be part of the global church. My own reflection will echo the sentiments expressed in the assembly preparations. My thesis, however, is that the pilgrimage to Busan began not merely a year before, but a full century ago. To this end, I analyze the ecumenical pilgrimage in general and end by focusing especially on how its concerns begin to coincide with the agenda of those investigating “World Christianity.” The preposition “toward” in my title is emphasized to signal that ecumenism and World Christianity are still in transition; they are at present more a direction and a vision.

This direction and vision of what the future holds for Christianity was partially experienced throughout the WCC Assembly in Busan, most concretely felt at the Global Ecumenical Theological Institute (GETI), which ran concurrently with the assembly. GETI brought together some 160 advanced theological students from more than 60 countries and six continents for two weeks of intense dialogue and mutual learning. A team of 20 international faculty members, representing most of the major Christian denominations and many ethnic communities, served as mentors. I was privileged to have been one of two Roman Catholic theologians on the mentoring team and so was able to participate in the WCC assembly as well. My article draws heavily on the insights gained from the GETI seminars, as well as from the plenary talks, ecumenical conversations, *madang* workshops, and confessional gatherings of the assembly. I offer my thoughts on the topic, fully cognizant of my own theological locus and experience of functioning primarily as an Asian theologian. My bias, therefore, is toward those on the margins. As I write this article I am also keenly aware that the Catholic Church is commemorating the 50th anniversary of the promulgation of *Unitas redintegratio*, Vatican Council II’s Decree on Ecumenism.

## The Modern Ecumenical Movement

The Busan (and WCC) pilgrimage in general is best appreciated within the context of the modern ecumenical movement. The WCC is actually both a product of the

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2. Wesley Ariarajah, “Achievements and Limits of the World Council of Churches,” in *Celebrating a Century of Ecumenism: Exploring the Achievements of International Dialogue*, ed. John A. Radano (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2012) 3–14, at 5.

3. WCC, “Pilgrimage to Busan: An Ecumenical Journey into World Christianity,” <http://wcc2013.info/en/resources/pilgrimage-to-busan/leaders-guide>.

movement and, since its foundation, its principal player. Western historians usually regard the World Missionary Conference (Edinburgh 1910) as the beginning of the modern ecumenical movement.

### *Edinburgh's Antecedents*

Ecumenism was not nonexistent prior to the 20th century. To be sure, the efforts of the 19th century actually contributed significantly to the Edinburgh 1910 conference. Christian missionaries were at the forefront of ecumenical exploration. Missionaries ministering in Asia and Africa at that time found themselves cooperating across denominational lines; they were often few in number and serving Christian communities that were themselves minorities in lands where other religious traditions thrive. While these missionaries might have started off working in isolation from missionaries of other churches, they usually ended up working in partnership. English Baptist missionary William Carey, for example, initially had insisted that each denomination ought to engage in its own ministry separately. After some dozen years of mission work in India, he developed a keen longing for partnership with missionaries from other churches and subsequently called for an interdenominational missionary conference in Cape Town “for the pooling of missionary experience on the problems common to them all.”<sup>4</sup> Collaborative ventures in fields such as Bible translations, health care, and education projects resulted from different interdenominational partnerships. These activities are often regarded as seeds of the ecumenical movement.

From the perspective of those in the so-called “mission fields” (a term contested by those whom these missions served), the beginnings of ecumenical history look quite different. Indian church historian T. V. Philip challenges the claim that Western missionaries initiated the ecumenical movement. He argues that ecumenism was already very much alive among Asian Christians before missionaries called for it, and was often, in fact, a response to the attitudes of the missionaries themselves:

A study of the history of the Church in China, Japan and India will show that the real impetus for Christian unity came from the Christians in these countries and not from Western missionaries. For example, it was the protest of the Indian Christians against Western denominations and missionary paternalism that led to church unity discussions in some of the missionary conferences in India. Moreover, several experiments in church union made in India were made by Indian Christians such as Christo Samaj in Calcutta, the National Christian Alliance in Western India and the National Church in Madras. Inspiration for such bold ecumenical experiments came not from the missionary movement but from the Indian national movement.<sup>5</sup>

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4. Ninan Koshy, *A History of the Ecumenical Movement in Asia*, vol. 1 (Hong Kong: World Student Christian Federation, 2004) 35.

5. T. V. Philip, *Ecumenism in Asia* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1994) 44, as quoted in Koshy, *Ecumenical Movement in Asia* 1:35–36.

Meantime, back in the North Atlantic a host of interdenominational activities were taking place, especially among younger Christians. The most significant of these addressed challenges posed by the radically altered social and living conditions that arose in light of the rural-urban migration following the industrial revolution. This informal movement eventually led to the foundation of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) and the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) in England in the first half of the 19th century. These associations spread rapidly to North America, Continental Europe, and elsewhere, especially among colonies of the British Empire. Even as they were never intended to be agencies for Christian unity, YMCA and YWCA founders and members soon discovered that their associations had become truly ecumenical. In many instances these associations were made up of Christians who joined the associations independently and not as representatives of any official church institution. Church membership or affiliation were non-issues. This was also true of their chapters and branches all over the world. It was only later, especially after World War I, that these young Christians felt that Christian unity was to become a central goal for them.<sup>6</sup>

The latter half of the 19th century saw the formation of the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF), bringing together autonomous national student Christian movements. The first impetus can actually be traced back to Asia where the first national student conference of Japan took place in Kyoto. Reflecting on the theme of "Christian Students United for World Conquest," the participants proposed that an international federation be established to assist them in connecting with other Christian youth worldwide. The proposal led to several other national gatherings in Europe, and at the third international conference (Vadstena Castle, Östergötland, Sweden, 1895) the WSCF was founded.<sup>7</sup> Key student leaders of the WSCF, such as John Mott and Nathan Söderblom, were to become major figures at the Edinburgh 1910 conference. Mott was a long-serving leader of the YMCA in the United States and thus attended the international conference, leading to the foundation of the WSCF. He later served as chair of the Edinburgh conference.

### *The Edinburgh Conference*

The 1910 Edinburgh conference had two principal aims: (1) to assist the missionaries with more effective methods, and (2) to abate the interdenominational competition in mission fields. To be sure, the Edinburgh conference was more a missionary than an ecumenical conference. Unity, at least in the mission fields, was actually in the service of evangelism. The title of the first commission report, "Carrying the Gospel to all the Non-Christian World," highlights the evangelism motif, and most of the other reports also emphasized missionary methods. Only in the eighth report did concerns about "Co-operation and the Promotion of Unity" appear.<sup>8</sup> The impetus for ecumenism was

6. Koshy, *Ecumenical Movement in Asia* 1:45.

7. *Ibid.* 1:44.

8. Edinburgh 2010, "Centenary of the 1910 World Missionary Conference," <http://www.edinburgh2010.org/en/resources/1910-conference.html>. The nine volumes of the 1910 conference publications are archived on this site.

the scandal of Christian division in the colonial territories, but reference was also made to the scandal of disunity in the missionaries' homelands of Europe and North America:

While we may differ from one another in our conception of what unity involves and requires, we agree in believing that our Lord intended that we should be one in a visible fellowship, and we desire to express our whole-hearted agreement with those who took part in the great conference of Shanghai, in holding that the ideal object of missionary work is to plant in every non-Christian nation one united Church of Christ. . . . The Church in western lands will reap a glorious reward from its missionary labours, if the church in the mission field points the way to a healing of its divisions and to the attainment of that unity for which our Lord prayed.<sup>9</sup>

If, for the Western missionaries, the pursuit of Christian unity was in service of evangelism, for the indigenous Christians in mission fields it was more in the interest of nationalism and liberation. Local Christians in Asia and Africa wanted a greater voice in the management and development of their own churches; they did not like the fact that the missionaries were the ones who initiated and controlled operations, while the inhabitants were expected merely to lend a hand. Local Christians longed to be treated as partners rather than subjected workers. These feelings, of course, were also shaped by anticolonial sentiments harbored by their own compatriots in the secular world toward ruling colonial governments.

Furthermore, some local Christians were also reflecting on their experience of having served as national leaders within Christian youth movements, where relationships with missionaries were more egalitarian. This did not necessarily mean, however, that egalitarianism reigned in the international arena: of the 1,200 delegates to the Edinburgh conference only 17 came from the two-thirds world, all invited because they were holding leadership positions in the SCMs and YMCAs of their own national chapters. One of them, V. S. Azariah of India, minced no words when addressing the problem of missionaries' patronizing attitudes:

My personal observation during a period of ten years, some of which have been spent travelling in different parts of India, in mission districts worked by different Missionary societies, has revealed to me the fact that the relationship between the European missionaries and the Indian workers is far from what it ought to be, and that a certain aloofness, a lack of mutual understanding and openness, a great lack of frank intercourse and friendliness, exists throughout the country. . . . The official relationship generally prevalent at present between the missionary and the Indian worker is that between a master and servant, in fact, the word often used in South India by the low grade Indian workers in addressing missionaries is *ejaman* or master. The missionary is the paymaster, the worker his servant.<sup>10</sup>

9. *World Missionary Conference, 1910: Report of Commission VIII: Co-operation and the Promotion of Unity* (Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson, & Ferrier, 1910) 131, <http://www.archive.org/stream/reportofcommissi08worluoft#page/130/mode/2up>.

10. "The Problem of Co-operation between Foreign and Native Workers: The Rev. V. S. Azariah," *World Missionary Conference, 1910: Report of Commission IX: The History and Records of the Conference, Together with Addresses Delivered at the Evening Meetings* (Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson & Ferrier, 1910) 306–15, at 307, 311, <http://www.ras-musen.org/special/Azariah.1910.pdf>.

Azariah's point was that the missionary–native problem lies in its being “a relationship of power, reflecting colonial attitudes, compounded with what we would now call racist attitudes.”<sup>11</sup> Another delegate, Cheng Ching-yi of China, appealed to the missionaries to make an effort to appreciate what local Christians wish to happen rather than to impose their will on them. He urged that they attempt to see matters from the perspective of the Chinese, many of whom “hope to see in the near future a united Christian church without denominational distinctions.”<sup>12</sup> In the same vein, Korean statesman C. H. Yun appealed for greater consultation with local church members on where and how the distribution of money and aid should take place. Reverend President K. Ibuka of Japan “raised questions about the cumbersome Western creeds with their underlying complicated [Western] theologies that were being foisted on Japanese Christians. . . . For Japan, there had to be simpler creeds that spoke to the Japanese situation.”<sup>13</sup> He claimed that though the natives had come up with their own simple Confession of Faith for the Church in Japan, the missionaries insisted that the Doctrinal Standards of Westminster be adopted instead. The native population, of course, “accepted, not cordially and of choice, but simply out of deference to the judgment and wishes of the missionaries.”<sup>14</sup>

These were some of the challenges posed to Western missionaries at the Edinburgh 1910 conference. While the conference aimed to strengthen Christian mission, it also provided a forum for the missionaries to hear the laments of those in the mission territories. To be sure, the conference accomplished more than it had set out to, and Christian unity—interdenominational as well as intradenominational—was among these accomplishments.

### Post-Edinburgh

Edinburgh 1910 concluded with the establishment of a continuation committee that was later to evolve into the International Missionary Council (IMC). The IMC was officially established in London in 1921 and consisted of members from Western Christian agencies and missionary societies and a network of interdenominational field bodies and Christian councils, including from Africa, Asia, and Latin America.<sup>15</sup> As expected, the IMC was especially concerned about the conditions and methods of mission but broadened these concerns—as if to respond to the feedback received at Edinburgh—to include issues such as missionary freedom, theological education,

11. D. Preman Niles, “Theological and Mission Concerns in the Ecumenical Movement in Asia,” in *A History of the Ecumenical Movement in Asia*, vol. 2, ed. Ninan Koshy (Hong Kong: Christian Conference of Asia, 2004) 19–84, at 23.

12. Koshy *Ecumenical Movement in Asia* 1:54.

13. Niles, “Theological and Mission Concerns” 24–25.

14. “Problem of Co-operation between Foreign and Native Workers” 296.

15. Jeffrey Gros, Eamon McManus, and Ann Riggs, *Introduction to Ecumenism* (New York: Paulist, 1998) 27.

racial discrimination, church in rural and industrial societies, and home and family life.<sup>16</sup>

Meanwhile, Christians in Europe began supporting justice and peace projects and joint social actions especially related to the tragedies of World War I. Under the leadership of Swedish Lutheran Bishop Nathan Söderblom, the ecumenically minded Christian leaders hosted an initial gathering in Stockholm, the Universal Christian Conference on Life and Work (1925). Its focus was on activities that would produce lasting peace, so the conference addressed issues of international relations and social and economic life for the benefit of peoples around the world. On the theological front comparable efforts were also taken to explore critical issues in matters of doctrine and practice, aimed at healing ecclesial divisions. Anglican Bishop Charles Brent of the US Episcopal Church had urged the Christian community to supplement the practical efforts of interdenominational cooperation with the more serious task of studying faith-and-order issues, many of which, he believed, were roots of Christian division. These efforts resulted in the formation of the Faith and Order Movement, which had its first international conference in Lausanne in 1927.

Aside from the above-mentioned initiatives, there was also an effort to establish a formal fellowship among the churches, an idea that was actually mooted as early as 1920 when Archbishop Germanos of Thyrateira, the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, in an encyclical entitled “To the Churches of Christ Everywhere,” issued a call for a League of Churches as a structure akin to the League of Nations.<sup>17</sup> The leadership of more than 100 churches voted in 1937–1938 to found the WCC. World War II delayed its establishment. Later, the Life and Work and the Faith and Order movements merged in 1948 and, together with a host of mainly Protestant churches and church organizations from Europe and North America, established the WCC at its first assembly, in Amsterdam (1948). The International Missionary Council joined the WCC in 1961, as did the World Council of Christian Education ten years later. (This latter council had its origins in the Sunday school movement of the 18th century.) Since these mergers the ministries of the respective streams have continued, but now each operates under the auspices of the WCC.

## The WCC’s Ecumenical Pilgrimage

The WCC began in 1948 as a fellowship of 147 organizations and churches. Today, more than 60 years later, its membership is close to 350 and includes churches, denominations, and church fellowships from more than 110 countries and territories

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16. International Missionary Council Archives 1910–1961: Part 1a (H–10,000: Early History and Committees), Record Group No. Fiche Ms85, Special Collections (Yale Divinity School Library, published by IDC, 2000), <http://www.idcpublishers.com/ead/archdesc.php?faid=138faid.xml>. Most of IMC’s proceedings are published in *International Review of Mission*.

17. Peter C. Bouteneff, “The World Council of Churches: An Orthodox Perspective,” in *Celebrating a Century of Ecumenism* 15–23, at 17.

throughout the world. Together these various groups represent over 500 million Christians, including most of the world's Orthodox churches, scores of Anglican, Baptist, Lutheran, Methodist, and Reformed churches, as well as many united and independent churches. The WCC's ecumenical vision is to (1) seek visible unity in one faith and one eucharistic fellowship; (2) promote common witness in work for mission and evangelism; and (3) engage in Christian service by meeting human need, breaking down barriers between people, seeking justice and peace, and upholding the integrity of creation.<sup>18</sup>

### *Theological and Ecclesiological Thrusts*

The WCC Assembly, which meets once every seven or eight years on different continents, is the WCC's highest decision-making body. Each assembly addresses a specific theme. A quick look at the direction these meetings have taken over the years will shed light on the course of the WCC's development. Former WCC General Secretary Konrad Raiser noticed that the first few assemblies focused on christological themes, such as "Christ, the hope of the world" at the 1954 Evanston Assembly and "Jesus Christ, the light of the world" at the 1961 New Delhi Assembly. This emphasis was understandable as confession of and witness to the Christic faith were the basis for the WCC's foundation. As the Council matured and in keeping with global changes—threats to society, human rights, and the environment were becoming more glaring and obvious—the WCC Assemblies also began exploring themes with broader focus, especially those that were more engaging of society as a whole. For example, the Busan Assembly's theme was "God of life, lead us to justice and peace"; and the 2006 Porto Alegre Assembly's theme was "God, in your grace, transform the world." Thus the WCC themes moved from an earlier focus on Christ and evangelism to a more inclusive interest in both intra- and extra-ecclesial concerns. Member churches were at the same time embracing a spirituality that was becoming more inclusive and concerned about the holistic development of the entire community. Raiser sums this up as a

movement from the earlier christocentrism to a fully trinitarian affirmation, and from the missionary and prophetic stance during the former decades to the prayerful recognition that with all our hopes and expectations for the renewal and transformation in church and world we depend on the grace of God through the workings of the Holy Spirit.<sup>19</sup>

WCC Assemblies are more than just occasions for discussing theological themes. Since the 6th assembly, which was held in Canberra in 1991, they have also become venues where representatives of the various ecumenical bodies and the worldwide

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18. See WCC, <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/about-us/self-understanding-vision>.

19. Konrad Raiser, "The Busan Assembly in the History of WCC Assemblies and as an Occasion to Unfold a New Ecumenical Vision," paper presented at GETI seminar (Busan, October, 29, 2013) 2; available on the GETI website, <http://www.globethics.net/web/global-ecumenical-theological-institute-geti>.



Christian communion congregate. In other words, not only the official delegates of member churches attend WCC assemblies, but other Christians do as well, though they have no voice in the voting process. Much happens at WCC assemblies besides the business meetings where voting on membership and leadership and passing of resolutions take place. Since the eighth assembly (1998), open sessions have been provided for people to make presentations, conduct workshops, and screen movies. These events all happen amid the dancing and singing taking place in a huge exhibition hall, which is also the site for displaying all kinds of information on church-related organizations. In short, WCC assemblies are truly ecumenical gathering spaces where one can get a glimpse of what is happening within Christianity worldwide.

The WCC was never meant to be a “world church” as such; this was clarified in response to questions that arose after its foundation and explicitly articulated in the 1950 statement, “The Church, the Churches, and the World Council of Churches,” adopted by the WCC Central Committee in Toronto.<sup>20</sup> The statement emphasized that the WCC “is not and must never become a superchurch” (III.1); it is at most to be looked upon as an instrument, albeit a privileged one, for the churches to come together to witness to the “fellowship of churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour according to the scriptures, and therefore seek to fulfil together their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.”<sup>21</sup> This statement was also the basis for membership, which was explicitly spelled out during the foundational assembly in Amsterdam. The Toronto statement also insists that the WCC “cannot and should not be based on any one particular conception of the church” (III.3). Membership in the WCC does, however, imply at least a recognition of and solidarity with the other member churches, even if there is divergence in understanding what it means to be church or what the WCC’s overall vision is supposed to be. Such is the pervasive and inclusive nature of the WCC, which has not been without its problems.

To be sure, over the years differences in understanding the WCC’s vision have arisen. An extensive study on the matter, launched in 1989, culminated in a clarifying statement adopted by the Central Committee in 1997. The document “Towards a Common Understanding and Vision of the World Council of Churches” (CUV) suggests that the very existence of the WCC can serve as an “ecclesiological challenge” to its member churches, and that the hope it generates for Christian unity can serve “as the ecclesiological significance of *koinonia*” (3.4).<sup>22</sup> It elaborates on this by stating that even if there is a variety of understandings of what the WCC is meant to be, there should be an acknowledgement “that the Council is more than a mere functional association of churches set up to organize activities in areas of common interest” (3.2). This “more,” of course, refers to a variety of possibilities, including what practically

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20. WCC, “Toronto statement,” [http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/central-committee/1950/toronto-statement?set\\_language=en](http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/central-committee/1950/toronto-statement?set_language=en).

21. WCC, <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/about-us>.

22. WCC, “Towards a Common Understanding and Vision of the WCC,” <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/about-us/self-understanding-vision/cuv>.

all the WCC statements before and since the CUV have been emphasizing, namely, the WCC's very first objective of calling the churches to the goal of visible unity.

### *Faith and Order Commission*

This is where the contributions of the Commission on Faith and Order (F&O) come prominently into play. It is this branch of the WCC that looks specifically at theological issues dividing the one church of Jesus Christ. For this reason the Commission on F&O, amid all its many activities engaged in since its founding, also acts as the WCC's "conscience."<sup>23</sup> Comprised of scholars and church leaders from all over the world, the Commission meets periodically for in-depth study of questions related to Christian division and "produce[s] texts and study documents which, while having no authority of their own over any church, are of significance and use by virtue of having been composed by a widely representative group of people from various Christian traditions."<sup>24</sup> The beginning years saw members of the commission basically engaged in the task of getting to know one another and especially the variety of churches and their theologies. The comparative method was employed—listing, comparing, and analyzing beliefs and practices across denominations. It was a necessary first step for the first two conferences where fundamental similarities and differences had to be identified first before moving on to the more delicate task of discerning their values and consistency with the Christian tradition.

The third world conference of the F&O Commission (Lund, 1952) shifted dramatically to the christological method. Here, instead of exploring the differences in ecclesiology, the focus shifted to "the reality of our fundamental unity in Jesus Christ, our common faith in Christ who is our 'given' common centre."<sup>25</sup> The thesis of the christological method is that when the churches are exploring how they can be more united in Christ, they will surely be growing closer to one another. This exploration entails going behind the manifest ecclesiological divisions to examine the deeper and richer mysteries of each church's union with Christ. Advances made in the fields of biblical scholarship, patristic, historical, and liturgical studies contributed significantly to the evolution of this new method in ecumenical dialogue. Also introduced was what came to be known as the "Lund principle," whereby an invitation was issued to the churches urging them to consider doing "together all those things which their consciences do not require them to do separately."<sup>26</sup> Worship and intercommunion were advances made at some interchurch gatherings. Also placed on the ecumenical agenda were so-called "non-theological" factors such as culture, class, race, and gender. These gave rise to contextual methodology, with serious implications on how one does ecumenical theology in

23. Mary Tanner, "Faith and Order: Achievements of Multilateral Dialogue," in *Celebrating a Century of Ecumenism* 24–37, at 26.

24. WCC, "Commission on Faith and Order," <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/what-we-do/faith-and-order>.

25. Kuncheria Pathil, *Models in Ecumenical Dialogue* (Bangalore: Dharmaram, 1981) 314.

26. Gros et al., *Introduction to Ecumenism* 142.

general and on the ecumenical agenda of unity in particular. Since the 1952 conference these factors have featured prominently in WCC studies and consultations.

By the 1970s the F&O narrowed down its study to three priority areas considered to be integral to visible unity: (1) common confession of faith; (2) common sacraments and ministry; and (3) common teaching authority.<sup>27</sup> The second area was attended to first, or at least was the first to produce tangible results. This came in the form of a convergence document, *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry (BEM)*, voted on in Lima in 1982. The document itself was just the first fruit of the conversations; even more impressive were the official responses to it from member churches, including most of the major denominations. More than half of the WCC member churches submitted official responses from the highest levels of authority. Combined with feedback from individual theologians and other interested parties, these responses filled six volumes of text. The *BEM* text was in its 39th printing in 2007, which at that time had “180,000 English copies in print and translations in about forty other languages.”<sup>28</sup> Moreover, the *BEM* text, also known as “the Lima document,” evolved from being simply a convergence document to a convergence instrument in that it was used to facilitate many dialogues across the spectrum of church life.

Work by the F&O on the other two priority areas met with less success. Exploration of the first concern, a common confession of the apostolic faith, resulted in the 1991 publication of the document *Confessing the One Faith: An Ecumenical Explication of the Apostolic Faith as It Is Confessed in the Nicene–Constantinopolitan Creed (381)*.<sup>29</sup> It went largely unnoticed. Perhaps member churches’ energy flagged after the *BEM*, or perhaps much more was happening in the ecumenical world by that time, with the host of bilateral and multilateral dialogues taking place among various denominations. Discussions on the third priority area, common ways of deciding and teaching with authority, did not realize any substantive results. Numerous other areas also received attention but, again, had little to show for the efforts. Just recently, however, another convergence document was released that might prove to be comparable in status to the *BEM* document. This document, entitled “The Church: Towards a Common Vision,” was approved by the F&O standing committee at its 2012 meeting in Penang and launched at the WCC Executive Committee meeting in Bossey on March 6, 2013. Focused on “the Church’s mission, unity, and its being in the Trinitarian life of God,” it “addresses our growth in communion—in apostolic faith, sacramental life, and ministry—as churches called to live in and for the world.”<sup>30</sup> It is too early to gauge the

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27. Tanner, “Faith and Order” 28.

28. William Henn, “The Achievements of Faith and Order: A Catholic Perspective,” in *Celebrating a Century of Ecumenism* 38–51, at 44.

29. *Confessing the One Faith: An Ecumenical Explication of the Apostolic Faith as It Is Confessed in the Nicene–Constantinopolitan Creed (381)*, Faith and Order Paper 153 (Geneva: WCC, 1991).

30. WCC, “The Church: Towards a Common Vision,” <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-commissions/faith-and-order-commission/i-unity-the-church-and-its-mission/the-church-towards-a-common-vision>.

document's reception; responses to it are not due until the end of 2015. The hope is that it will impel the F&O, as well as the WCC and the ecumenical movement, to meet the challenges of the 21st century.

### *WCC Accomplishments*

The F&O Commission's agreed-upon collaboration with the other branches within the WCC marks a distinctive development. Thereafter the F&O began looking at faith-and-doctrine concerns in the context of social issues such as racism, gender discrimination, poverty, indigenous rights, and human rights. These latter issues were within the purview of other WCC departments such as its Public Witness and Diakonia program area. Mary Tanner, F&O moderator from 1991 to 1998, gave an example of why this development is significant:

What at first seemed to be a women's liberation struggle, taken over from the secular women's movement, was shown to be a profoundly ecclesiological matter with implications for our understanding of God, our language, symbols, and imagery, our ways of doing theology and celebrating the sacraments, our ministry and our exercise of authority.<sup>31</sup>

The integration of the sociopolitical ministry of the WCC with its faith-and-order deliberations was also a logical step, given that this ministry is the WCC's most significant contribution to society and has come to represent its public persona. This was due primarily to the efforts of the Life and Work movement, which has since been integrated into the WCC. Long-time WCC staff person Wesley Ariarajah spells out the areas in which the WCC has made an impact, not only in its service to society but also in facilitating discussion and reflection:

WCC's programs in relation to Apartheid in South Africa, racism in general, human rights, religious freedom, economic justice, poverty, indigenous peoples, sustainable development, science and technology, Christian education, theological education, environment, migration, AIDS, disability, spirituality, renewal, laity, youth, etc., animated theological reflections, debates, and disagreements and touched peoples in all parts of the world.<sup>32</sup>

Its contribution in these areas is not surprising and was more a result of who came to constitute WCC's membership and leadership. With more churches joining the WCC from the developing nations where many of these social challenges lie, and with many of their constituents taking on leadership roles in the various WCC commissions and subunits, it made sense that the WCC's focus shifted to life-and-work as well as life-and-death issues.

Another major accomplishment of the WCC was its enlisting the Orthodox family of churches. While the Ecumenical Patriarchate was a founding member of the WCC

31. Tanner, "Faith and Order" 31.

32. Ariarajah, "Achievements and Limits" 8.

and permanent representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church have participated in the WCC since the 1961 Assembly, their inclusion was not without consequence. On the one hand, the WCC was quickly branded as Communist, especially by right-wing forces in the United States during the Cold War. The WCC, however, did not cave in to the political pressure, as it realized that its forum was “one of the few places in which the churches from Eastern Europe could meet fellow Christians and keep alive the hope of survival and solidarity.”<sup>33</sup> On the other hand, including the Orthodox community was also a challenge to the WCC itself. Given that it was a predominantly Western and Protestant organization, its challenge was to be genuinely inclusive of the views and style of the Eastern Christians. Several Orthodox churches, citing a variety of issues, withdrew from the WCC, especially after the fall of the Berlin Wall. One problem cited was its parliamentary decision-making process that disadvantaged minorities. This was the experience of the Orthodox Christians, aggravated largely by the paradox that even as they constituted almost half of WCC’s total constituency, they occupied only 25 out of the 350 seats. In addressing this problem the WCC shifted from the parliamentarian voting system to the consensus method, making for more meaningful participation: “In this way the problem of minority–majority was largely defused. With the promise that no voice would be stifled, churches could deliberate and discuss even the most controversial issues without the threat of being implicated in statements that they could not stand behind.”<sup>34</sup>

Space does not allow me to recount all the other accomplishments of the WCC, but I must mention one more: full participation of the Roman Catholic Church (RCC), at least in the F&O and the Mission commissions. This promising partnership enhanced the WCC–RCC relationship by allowing both parties to come together and establish the Joint Working Group. Suffice it to say that the WCC’s contribution to the ecumenical movement has been immense.

## The Roman Catholic Church’s Ecumenical Pilgrimage

The Roman Catholic Church (RCC) is a latecomer to the modern ecumenical movement. Still reeling from the Protestant Reformation, its attitude toward ecumenism was very much shaped by an ecclesiology of “return” of the “schismatics” and “heretics” to the Holy Roman Catholic Church. When Anglican Bishop Charles Brent met with Pope Benedict XV in 1919 to discuss the possible participation of the RCC in the F&O movement, the pope declined. But he did promise to pray for the initiative and added that “if the congress is practicable, the participants may, by God’s grace, see the light and become reunited to the visible head of the church, by whom they would be received with open arms.”<sup>35</sup> The Vatican offices similarly declined when invited to send Catholic participants to the first Life and Work conference (1925).

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33. Gros et al., *Introduction to Ecumenism* 135.

34. Bouteneff, “An Orthodox Perspective” 20.

35. Tom F. Stransky, “Roman Catholic Church and Ecumenism,” in *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, 2nd ed. (Geneva: WCC, 2002) 996–98, at 997.

It is certainly not a coincidence that Pope Pius XI's encyclical *Mortalium animos* ("On Religious Unity") was promulgated shortly after the first conference of the F&O in 1927.<sup>36</sup> The document begins by informing Catholics about the ecumenical efforts under way and the attempts at fostering unity among Christians. It then cautions them to be wary that "beneath these enticing words and blandishments lies hid a most grave error, by which the foundations of the Catholic faith are completely destroyed" (no. 4).

This being so, it is clear that the Apostolic See cannot on any terms take part in their assemblies, nor is it anyway lawful for Catholics either to support or to work for such enterprises; for if they do so they will be giving countenance to a false Christianity, quite alien to the one Church of Christ. (No. 8)

### *Beginnings of Openness*

In the following decades the Vatican blocked all attempts by Catholics to participate in the activities of the ecumenical movement. In 1948 the Vatican even issued a notice to "the Netherlands bishops to forbid [Roman Catholics] to be present in any role, no matter how unofficial, at the WCC's founding general assembly in Amsterdam."<sup>37</sup> But things took a more positive turn shortly thereafter. *Ecclesia sancta* (1949), issued by the Curia's Holy Office, looked upon the ecumenical movement with less antagonism. As Aidan Nichols remarked, the document suggested that the ecumenical movement

derived its basic impulse from the inspiration of the "Holy Spirit" and so should constitute a "source of holy joy" for Catholics. They were to take their efforts seriously while simultaneously insisting on the need for return to the divinely established centre of unity for the Christian world, the Petrine office.<sup>38</sup>

Subsequently, special approval was given to some Catholic experts and theologians to engage in dialogue with their fellow Christians from other denominations.

Augustinian priest George Tavard attended the Second Assembly of the WCC in 1954, albeit unofficially; later, however, he was officially appointed to serve as a Catholic observer at the F&O Commission conference in Montreal in 1963.<sup>39</sup> He attended the Second Vatican Council as a peritus and was later to play a significant role, as representative of the Catholic Church, in a number of bilateral dialogues. Two Jesuit priests, John Courtney Murray and Gustave Weigel, were also officially approved to attend the Conference on F&O in Oberlin, Ohio, in 1957. They were to

36. Pope Pius IX, *Mortalium animos* (January 16, 1928), [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/pius\\_xi/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_p-xi\\_enc\\_19280106\\_mortalium-animos\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xi/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_19280106_mortalium-animos_en.html).

37. Stransky, "Roman Catholic Church" 997.

38. Aidan Nichols, "Catholic Ecumenism," in *Catholic Thought since the Enlightenment: A Survey* (Pretoria: Unisa, 1998) 159–63, at 160.

39. The Assumptionists: US Region, North American Province, "Rev. George Tavard, A.A.," <http://www.assumption.us/Tavard/biography.htm>.

become ecumenical giants within the Catholic Church and contributed significantly to the discourse on church unity, especially in North America. Murray is well known for his contributions to Vatican II's *Dignitatis humanae*, Declaration on Religious Freedom, earning him the reputation of being the "key agent in making Roman Catholics safe for America, while also making America safe for Catholics."<sup>40</sup> Arguing that human dignity, especially in its social dimensions and civic freedom, is consistent with God's will, Murray "removed from Roman Catholics the longstanding religious obligation to establish Catholicism as the religion of America and to suppress public heretical and atheistic voices, should Catholics gain sufficient power."<sup>41</sup> This change was especially relevant in the era surrounding the election of John F. Kennedy as the United States' first Roman Catholic president. Religious freedom aside, Murray was also known for his ecumenical commitment, though, as he admits, he and those of his generation had to be gradually converted to it:

Theological education, which is the preparation for the proclamation of the Word of God, must . . . take place in dialogue. The necessity of the conclusion would seem to be obvious. The men of my generation have been converts to ecumenism; we were not brought up as ecumenists. Now we have to see to it that theological students are, as it were, born ecumenists. Moreover, even at the moment, not to speak of the past, ecumenism appears as a dimension added to theology from without. We have to see to it that ecumenism becomes a quality inherent in theology, as it is an impulse intrinsic to Christian faith itself. We have to develop a new style of theology and a new style of theologian.<sup>42</sup>

There was actually no shortage of this new style of theology or of avant-garde theologians within the Catholic Church in the 1950s and 1960s. Among those who played a significant role in pioneering and advancing Catholic ecumenism were theologians "such as Abbé Ferdinand Portal, C.M. (1855–1960), Dominican Yves Congar, O.P. (1904–1995), [and] Father Paul Couturier (1881–1953), [all of whose works] began to lay the groundwork that bore fruit with the Second Vatican Council."<sup>43</sup>

### *Second Vatican Council*

More than any other initiative, it was the Second Vatican Council that opened up the RCC to the modern ecumenical movement, producing a generation of ecumenically minded Catholics. In convoking the council, Pope John XXIII expressed his wish that ecumenism be among the primary concerns for the world's bishops to discuss. His experience as papal nuncio to Turkey and Bulgaria, where he befriended leaders from the

40. J. Leon Hooper, S.J., "John Courtney Murray, S.J. (1904–67): Working with God," *Theology Today* 62 (2005) 342–51, at 342.

41. *Ibid.* 343.

42. J. Leon Hooper, S.J., ed., *Bridging the Sacred and the Secular: Selected Writings of John Courtney Murray* (Washington: Georgetown University, 1994) 331. The date of Murray's text is 1932.

43. Gros et al., *Introduction to Ecumenism* 29.

Orthodox and Old Oriental Churches, probably played a role in this commitment. He established the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity in 1960 (elevated to Pontifical Council status in 1988) to identify and invite the major Orthodox, Protestant, Anglican, and Reformed Churches and Church Communions to send representatives to serve as observers of the council. Both of these moves were unprecedented in church history. By the end of 1965, nearly 100 of these who were now called “our separated brethren”—previously known as “schismatics” and “heretics”<sup>44</sup>—had participated in the council.

Some of these ecumenical observers were actively involved in the WCC’s F&O Commission. As the Secretariat played a critical role in the preparation of “the documents on ecumenism (*Unitatis redintegratio*), on non-Christian religions (*Nostra aetate*), on religious liberty (*Dignitatis humanae*) and, together with the doctrinal commission, the dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation (*Dei verbum*),” the observers’ influence in the council was obvious.<sup>45</sup> Though they had no voice during the official sessions, it is not difficult to imagine that the interactions and discussions during coffee breaks and postsession debates would include issues that the ecumenical movement was addressing or had already attended to. Some ideas naturally found their way into the Vatican documents. In fact, one can easily observe that the “Faith and Order’s landmark statement on ‘Scripture, Tradition and Traditions’ of 1963 was contemporaneous with important developments in the way Catholics think about scripture and its relation to tradition.”<sup>46</sup> A comparison between that F&O document and *Dei verbum* will lead one “to note the dramatic convergence that emerged.”<sup>47</sup> Beyond texts and documents gestures also count in assessing the RCC’s seriousness with regard to the ecumenical agenda. One such gesture which made clear that ecumenism was advancing was presented toward the end of the council. Cardinal Franz König, archbishop of Vienna and Council Father, recounts:

I will never forget the solemn ecumenical service in St Peter’s on 7 December 1965 which marked the end of the council. I was one of a small group on the altar with Pope Paul VI. After asking the representative of the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople to join him there, the Pope announced that the Papal Bull of 1054, which had declared the Great Schism between the Western and Eastern Church, was now null and void. I can still hear the thundering burst of spontaneous applause with which this announcement was greeted. For me this highlight signalled that the impulses set off by the council were already at work. The crucial process of reception, that all-important part of any church council, which can take several generations, had begun. It continues today.<sup>48</sup>

44. R. C. Sproul, “The Defense and Confirmation of the Gospel,” in *The Unadjusted Gospel*, ed. Mark Dever et al. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014) 35–47, at 45.

45. The Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/chrstuni/documents/rc\\_pc\\_chrstuni\\_pro\\_20051996\\_chrstuni\\_pro\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/documents/rc_pc_chrstuni_pro_20051996_chrstuni_pro_en.html).

46. Henn, “Achievements of Faith and Order” 43.

47. Gros et al., *Introduction to Ecumenism* 144.

48. Cardinal Franz König, “It Must Be the Holy Spirit,” *Tablet* (December 21–28, 2002), [http://www.bc.edu/content/dam/files/research\\_sites/cjl/texts/cjrelations/resources/articles/konig.htm](http://www.bc.edu/content/dam/files/research_sites/cjl/texts/cjrelations/resources/articles/konig.htm).



## The RCC's Quest for Christian Unity

The decree *Unitatis redintegratio* (1964) was the council's official statement on ecumenism. Since then a number of documents have been promulgated to promote the RCC's commitment to Christian unity. In 1967 the *Directory . . . concerning Ecumenical Matters, Part I* was published; Part II followed in 1970 as *Ecumenism in Higher Education*.<sup>49</sup> The publication in 1993 of the *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism* and Pope John Paul II's encyclical *Ut unum sint* (1995) added a major impetus to the Catholic Church's ecumenical agenda. But the reception of Vatican II's ecumenical mandate is best discerned in the steps taken by the Church at local levels. The Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (PCPCU, founded in 1960) organized a consultation in November 2004 to mark the 40th anniversary of *Unitatis redintegratio*, as well as to review and assess progress made by the Church in ecumenical matters. PCPCU Secretary Bishop Brian Farrell proudly announced that "the degree of commitment to the ecumenical task at the local level throughout the Church is growing in intensity and extension."<sup>50</sup>

A number of signs indicate that Catholics everywhere have generally embraced the call to Christian unity. Attitudes of triumphalism, suspicion, polemics, and condemnation have generally given way to respect, acceptance, and even admiration of the other Christian denominations. Prior to Vatican II, even stepping foot into another Christian church was unthinkable, but today interdenominational marriages, joint liturgical celebrations, and actively collaborating with other Christians to host civic, local, and national celebrations have become commonplace. Most dioceses are actively involved in organizing the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity (whose beginnings actually preceded the 1910 Edinburgh conference), and many are also involved in the practice of spiritual ecumenism in various forms—the Taizé Community, for example. There is currently a widespread exchange of resources, sharing of church buildings, and, in some regions and countries, the establishment of ecumenical formation programs, including theological consortia of Catholic and Protestant seminaries.

On organizational levels, most Episcopal conferences around the world have a department or commission for promoting Christian unity. Farrell reports that "in some countries there are flourishing *support groups and associations* of people well trained in ecumenism, active in ecumenical education in Dioceses, parishes, groups and seminaries."<sup>51</sup> Prior to Vatican II the RCC was not a member of any National Council of Churches (NCC); today about 70 of the 120 NCCs worldwide have Catholic

49. Catholic Church, *Directory for the Application of the Decisions of the Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican concerning Ecumenical Matters, May 14, 1967, Part I and Part II: Ecumenism in Higher Education* (Washington: US Catholic Conference, 1967, 1970). See Gros et al., *Introduction to Ecumenism* 40.

50. PCPCU, "Ecumenism Today: The Situation in the Catholic Church," presentation by Bishop Brian Farrell, secretary of the PCPCU, [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/chrstuni/documents/rc\\_pc\\_chrstuni\\_doc\\_20041121\\_farrell-ecumenismo\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/documents/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_20041121_farrell-ecumenismo_en.html).

51. *Ibid.*, emphasis original.

membership. The Catholic Episcopal Conference of countries mainly in Europe, Africa, Oceania, and the Caribbean participate in the NCCs (each nation's umbrella organization for Christians of all denominations).<sup>52</sup> Since 1968 the Vatican has been appointing about a dozen Catholic theologians to be official members of WCC's F&O Commission. It has also established a Joint Working Group between the Catholic Church and the WCC and is responsible for identifying Catholics to be sent as observers to various ecumenical gatherings as well as invite fraternal delegates of other churches or ecclesial communities to participate in major events of the Catholic Church, such as the synod of bishops. The PCPCU lists the following churches and world communions as partners engaged with the Catholic Church in international theological dialogues: Orthodox Churches of the Byzantine Tradition, Oriental Orthodox Churches, Assyrian Church of the East, the International Old Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Union of Utrecht, Anglican Communion, Lutheran World Federation, World Methodist Council, World Alliance of Reformed Churches, Baptist World Alliance, Disciples of Christ, Mennonite World Conference, World Evangelical Alliance, and some Pentecostal groups.<sup>53</sup>

I say *some* Pentecostal groups because, while advances have been made with Pentecostals, difficulties remain, for two main reasons: First, it is not possible to identify an entity that speaks for Pentecostalism as a whole. Second, the international Pentecostal–Catholic dialogue, has often been labeled “extraordinary” or “improbable,” as the two parties are perceived to have little in common: one regards itself as *the* church, the other as a movement; one is officially hierarchical, the other congregational; one is highly ritualized, the other more spontaneous; one has been around for millennia, the other for a mere century; and one has more than a billion adherents, the other far less, depending on how and whom you count.<sup>54</sup> Nevertheless, the relationship has been ongoing for more than four decades now, even if road bumps abound. While some Pentecostal groups are open, others may not be keen to have any relationship with the RCC. In any case, despite the challenges, there is no doubting the RCC's commitment to the mandate of ecumenism even as the pilgrimage in the quest for Christian unity may not be easy.

## Ecumenism for the 21st Century

Even if the Catholic–Pentecostal dialogue is an interesting challenge, the present ecumenical movement cannot ignore it. Difficult as the dialogue is, indications are that the

52. “Inspired by the Same Vision: Roman Catholic Participation in National and Regional Council of Churches,” in *Growth in Agreement III: International Dialogue Texts and Agreed Statements, 1998–2005*, ed. Jeffrey Gros, Thomas F. Best, and Lorelei F. Fuchs (Geneva: WCC, 2007) 531–58, at 533.

53. See Vatican, PCPCU, [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/chrstuni/documents/rc\\_pc\\_chrstuni\\_pro\\_20051996\\_chrstuni\\_pro\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/documents/rc_pc_chrstuni_pro_20051996_chrstuni_pro_en.html).

54. Cecil M. Robeck Jr., “The Achievements of the Pentecostal–Catholic International Dialogue,” in *Celebrating a Century of Ecumenism*) 163–94, at 163–64.

Pentecostal movement will be a major world player in Christian mission in the near future. At Edinburgh 1910 the missionaries had dreamed of converting the world to Christ in general and to their churches in particular. The report of the conference's first commission begins with these words:

It is a startling and solemnizing fact that even as late as the twentieth century the Great Command of Jesus Christ to carry the Gospel to all mankind is still so largely unfulfilled. It is a ground for great hopefulness that, notwithstanding the serious situation occasioned by such neglect, the Church is confronted to-day, as in no preceding generation, with a world-wide opportunity to make Christ known.<sup>55</sup>

In reflecting on the Edinburgh 1910 event, American missiologist Stephen Bevans provides a concrete illustration of this optimism:

John R. Mott saw a real confluence of the power of the gospel and the power of modern science, and it was this that convinced him of the possibility of the conversion of the world by the end of what others had called "the Christian Century." The church, Mott and many others believed, "stood at a *kairos* moment," and the doors that were open might not stay open indefinitely.<sup>56</sup>

Not only have the dreams of the Edinburgh 1910 delegates gone largely unfulfilled, but it also looks as if they are being slowly snatched away. The protagonists of Edinburgh 1910 were primarily from the mainline churches, many of which, especially in the global North, have seen a decline in membership in the recent decades. This is not to suggest that Christianity on the whole is in decline. It is not. Its proportion relative to the world's population remains more or less as it was a century ago, at around one-third.<sup>57</sup> But what has changed is that the balance is sustained primarily by the boom within the Pentecostals, Evangelicals, (neo)Charismatics, non- and post-denominational and independent churches.<sup>58</sup> The gospel is still being carried worldwide, albeit by a new lineage of Christians. Pentecostals, Evangelicals, and Charismatics were either nonexistent in 1910 or just emerging, but they have made impressive gains in their recruitment since. Not

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55. World Missionary Conference, *Report of Commission I: Carrying the Gospel to All the Non-Christian World* (Edinburgh: Oliphant, Anderson, & Ferrier, 1910) 1.

56. Stephen Bevans, "From Edinburgh to Edinburgh: Toward a Missiology for a World Church," in *Mission after Christendom: Emergent Themes in Contemporary Mission*, ed. Ogbu U. Kalu, Peter Vethanayagamony, and Edmund Kee-Fook Chia (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2010) 1–11, at 6.

57. Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Bellafatto, "The Demographic Status of World Christianity in the 21st Century," in *Ecumenical Visions for the 21st Century: A Reader for Theological Education*, ed. Mélisande Lorke and Dietrich Werner (Geneva: WCC, 2013) 17–26, at 19.

58. For a description of some of these terms refer to the WCC document "A Changing World: Reflections on the Changing Landscapes of World Christianity," Report from the WCC's 9th Assembly, Porto Alegre, Brazil, 2006, in *Ecumenical Visions for the 21st Century* 362–69, at 363.

only are they converting adherents of other religious traditions—in particular from indigenous and tribal communities around the world—they are also opening their doors to many Christians who are leaving mainline churches. They are primarily responsible for transforming the global ecclesial landscape.

### *New Face of Christianity*

The change in the global ecclesial landscape is well documented. Perhaps the most comprehensive empirical work on this is the one done by the Center for the Study of Global Christianity of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in Boston.<sup>59</sup> According to its analysis, “the most significant trend within global Christianity is that, demographically, Christianity has shifted dramatically to the South.”<sup>60</sup> This apparently began in the 1950s, accompanying the independence movement in the nations of the African continent, and continued through to the 1970s when Christianity gained significantly in numbers in many Asian countries. By 1981 the South had exceeded the North in Christian population. This is the demographic turning point into the third millennium, just as the year 923 was the turning point into the second millennium when Christians in the North outnumbered those in the South.<sup>61</sup> In the first millennium Christianity was primarily a Southern religion, “heavily concentrated in the Mediterranean regions, including Asia, northern Africa and southern Europe roughly centred in the Roman Empire.”<sup>62</sup>

What this southward shift in Christianity in the last 30 years means, according to Evangelical theologian Mark Noll, is that

this past Sunday it is possible that more Christian believers attended church in China than in all of so-called “Christian Europe.” . . . Roman Catholics in the United States worshiped in more languages than at any previous time in American history. . . . The churches with the largest attendance in England and France had mostly black congregations. . . . This past week in Great Britain, at least fifteen thousand Christian foreign missionaries were hard at work evangelizing the locals. Most of these missionaries are from Africa and Asia.<sup>63</sup>

The “Southernization” of Christianity will make its mark globally. Before long we will hear that global Christian centers refer no longer to Rome, Paris, or Geneva but to

59. World Christian Database, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Center for the Study of Global Christianity, <http://www.worldchristiandatabase.org/wcd>.

60. Johnson and Bellafatto, “Demographic Status” 19–20.

61. John Stott and Sun Young Chung, “Christianity’s Center of Gravity, AD 33–2100,” in *Atlas of Global Christianity*, ed. Todd Johnson and Kenneth Ross (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University, 2009) 50–51, at 50.

62. Wonsuk Ma, “A Millennial Shift of Global Christianity: A Brief Overview,” paper presented at GETI seminar (Busan, November 1, 2013) 1, <http://www.globethics.net/web/geti/geti>.

63. Mark A. Noll, *The New Shape of World Christianity: How American Experience Reflects Global Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009) 19–37, at 20–21.

Nairobi, Manila, or Rio de Janeiro. Church growth in the North would be a function not so much of the number of baptisms of Westerners but of the influx of migrants from the South. Missionaries will continue to be sent but now in the form of “reverse mission,” where churches of former mission territories are sending missionaries to the North to keep their mother churches alive. Never mind that Pope Francis questioned the morality of an element of this when he spoke of the “novice trade” where young religious are recruited from the poor South to care for elderly members of their congregations in the rich North.<sup>64</sup> Of course, the very election of Jorge Mario Bergoglio as pope is further evidence of this Southernization process, at least at the leadership level of the RCC. His appointment of a number of new cardinals from developing nations, including Haiti, Burkina Faso, Myanmar, Cape Verde, and Tonga, is another move in that direction.

The blossoming of Southern Christianity, however, is actually due not so much to colonialism as in spite of it. Ghanaian scholar Lamin Sanneh posits that “the comprehensive decline of Christianity failed to follow the end of colonialism and of mainline missions. Instead, Christian numbers grew at a much faster rate than ever before, confounding critic and supporter alike.”<sup>65</sup> According to Sanneh’s analysis, it is the native missionaries who have been primarily responsible for the growth of Christianity; “this expansion has taken place *after* colonialism and during the period of national awakening. Perhaps colonialism was an obstacle to the growth of Christianity, so that when colonialism ended it removed the stumbling block.”<sup>66</sup> One of the major hallmarks of this new Southern Christianity is that the Christian faith is expressed differently from one church to the next. The thrust toward contextualization and localization has become the order of the day.

Typically, homegrown churches led by native missionaries are the ones that are growing by leaps and bounds. The Yoido Full Gospel Pentecostal Church in Seoul is an example. Founded by David Yonggi Cho about 50 years ago, its membership exceeds one million, with Sunday attendance in a single campus at more than 200,000 members, making it the largest megachurch on earth today. Homegrown movements can also be found within the mainline churches. An example from the RCC is the *El Shaddai* Catholic Charismatic movement in the Philippines, which was born about 30 years ago. Under the leadership of Brother Mike Velarde its worldwide membership—spread primarily through Filipino migrant workers—is around ten million.<sup>67</sup> The Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines shrewdly brought it under its official umbrella by appointing a bishop to serve as the movement’s spiritual director. These

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64. John L. Allen Jr., “The Clergy Trade; Melady; Pope-Watch; and the Boston Globe,” *NCRonline* (January 10, 2014), <http://ncronline.org/blogs/all-things-catholic/clergy-trade-melady-pope-watch-and-boston-globe>.

65. Lamin Sanneh, *Whose Religion Is Christianity? The Gospel beyond the West* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003) 17.

66. *Ibid.* 18.

67. José Mario C. Francisco, “The Philippines,” in *Christianities in Asia*, ed. Peter C. Phan (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011) 97–127, at 118.

are the new faces of Christianity in the world today; the phenomenon has given rise to the discussion on World Christianity.

### *World Christianity or Christianities?*

The idea of World Christianity is of recent parlance. Today, we find the *Journal of World Christianity* and another called *Studies in World Christianity*, along with centers dedicated specifically to the cause, such as the Nagel Institute for World Christianity of Calvin College, the Centre for World Christianity and Interreligious Studies of Radboud University Nijmegen, and the Centre for the Study of World Christianity in Edinburgh. It has to be noted that these centers are all located in the West, as the phenomenon is “new” only from the Western perspective. While it did appear in earlier times, it was only in the last decade or so that

the term “world Christianity” was popularized through a series of publications beginning most notably with Dana Robert’s essay, “Shifting Southward: Global Christianity since 1945” (2000), Philip Jenkins’s *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (2002), and Lamin Sanneh’s *Whose Religion Is Christianity?: The Gospel Beyond the West* (2003).<sup>68</sup>

The rise of World Christianity parallels the advent of the term “world religions” about a century earlier. When Western scholars began on a large scale to be aware of the presence of other religions, the term “world religions” came into currency.<sup>69</sup> Prior to that “religion” referred mainly to Christianity, as if no other religions existed. “World religions” (a term that continues to be disputed since the criteria for what constitutes a “world” religion is unclear) or the acknowledgement of the world’s many religions in the late 19th century was due as much to the European academy’s penchant for “othering” and classifying “the rest” in relation to its own as to an attempt to maintain hegemony. If anything, it looks like the attempt backfired. Bevans offers an incisive description of the paradox:

A century ago there was no doubt of the superiority of Christianity over the other world religions: the modern “master narrative” was in full force. This was evidenced at Chicago’s 1893 World Parliament of Religions and at Edinburgh itself, where the demise of the other world religions was confidently predicted if Christians would take the initiative boldly and quickly.<sup>70</sup>

Not only did this not happen, but the other religions have since experienced a renaissance. Moreover, instead of Christianity advancing to the East, the Ramakrishna

68. Charles E. Farhadian, ed., *Introducing World Christianity* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012) 3.

69. Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions: Or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2005) 20.

70. Bevans, “From Edinburgh to Edinburgh” 6.

mission, Zen Buddhism, and other Eastern religious movements have made significant inroads in the West. The resurgence of Eastern religions was in part due to a speech delivered by an invitee to the Parliament, Swami Vivekananda, who enthralled the Western delegates with the inclusiveness of Eastern spiritualities.<sup>71</sup>

The term “World Christianity” seems to have arisen under somewhat similarly oblique circumstances, and can be attributed to two realizations. The first was European Christianity’s decline, prompting scholars to posit the thesis of secularization as well as to engage in conversations about the end of religion. Of course we know now that this thesis was unfounded. A second and more important realization was the new consciousness that Western Christianity is not the only one there is; Christianity exists in many forms. Hence, the appreciation for non-Western forms of Christianity. Previously, even if Asian Christianity, African Christianity, and the other contextual forms of Christianity were in existence for centuries and millennia, European Christianity considered itself normative, audaciously presenting itself devoid of any qualifier. It was simply referred to as “Christianity,” rather like the way Christianity was passed off simply as “religion.”

The exploration of World Christianity, therefore, has primarily to do with examining the different forms of Christianity around the world, usually in comparison with forms found in the West. The exploration is concerned with the pluralistic expressions of Christianity in its various dimensions: language, community, structure, liturgy, theology, and so forth. The many expressions of Christianity resonate well with the post-modern ethos in which diversity is not only a given but appreciated as well. Southern Christianity betrays all the hallmarks of such pluralism. The fact that it is primarily homegrown suggests that each “home” produces its own brand of Christianity. That is why it might be more accurate to speak of World Christianity in the plural—Christianities—just as Vietnamese American theologian Peter Phan entitled his book *Christianities in Asia*. Christianity in Asia has to be spoken of in the plural, Phan insists, because “Christian multiformity is a function of the enormous geographical, sociopolitical, historical, cultural, and religious diversity of the continent called Asia.”<sup>72</sup> One is reminded here of the early church, especially during the New Testament era, when the Christian communities were “diverse with different forms of ministries, patterns of organizations, and having a variety of articulations of faith and ways of worship which were spontaneously shaped by their different historical, cultural, and religious contexts.”<sup>73</sup> Contemporary Southern Christianity seems to be returning to the Christian origins of contextualized expressions of the faith. Connie Au, the Director of the Pentecostal Research Center in Hong Kong, in her discussion of Pentecostalism in

71. “Vivekananda’s Speech to 1893 Parliament,” *Council for a Parliament of the World’s Religions: The Parliament Blog* (September 18, 2013), <http://www.parliamentofreligions.org/news/index.php/category/previous-parliaments/1893-parliament-chicago>.

72. Phan, *Christianities in Asia* 1.

73. Kuncheria Pathil, “Theology of Ecumenism in the Asian Context: A Catholic Perspective,” in *Our Pilgrimage in Hope: Proceedings of the First Three Seminars of the Asian Movement for Christian Unity* (Manila: St. Paul’s, 2001) 9–37, at 25.

Asia, especially the churches spread by the indigenous and native-born missionaries, alerts us to the fact that most of these churches developed out of a “praxis derived from self-interpretation of the Bible according to its own Asian cultural and religious context and personal experience of the divine, such as the True Jesus Church and Jesus Family in China.”<sup>74</sup>

A byproduct of the plural character of World Christianity is that the organizational structures of the new churches are basically polycentric. If the RCC is identified with Rome, the WCC with Geneva, and Orthodox Christianity with Constantinople, one would be hard-pressed to identify a center for the many independent, Pentecostal, and Charismatic churches established in the last century. Because these churches have no centralized authority, one can imagine the length and breadth they must travel in their search for what it means to be Christian in their local contexts. It comes as no surprise then that some may espouse spiritualities that are considered eclectic or at least manifestly different from what mainline Christians are used to: “The Charismatic movement has brought a dramatic shift in Christian identities. . . . Multiple Christian identity is a reality, particularly visible in Asia where denominational boundaries are often porous.”<sup>75</sup> The consequence is that many of these movements are not accepted or even acknowledged as Christian. Oftentimes, labels such as “sects” or “cults” are used rather unsparingly when referring to the Pentecostal, Evangelical, Charismatic, and independent churches. In describing the African-initiated churches, English missiologist Kirsteen Kim opines, “Because they expressed their faith in a characteristically African way, many viewed them as separatist. Because some of their practices resembled the reviled indigenous religious traditions, they were accused of syncretism.”<sup>76</sup> She reports that in India, compared to mainline churches, “there are at least as many Christians in indigenous churches and Pentecostal movements, plus an estimated three million who worship Christ while remaining Hindus.”<sup>77</sup>

Whatever identities these new churches and movements may embrace, it will be to the detriment of the ecumenical movement to ignore them. Kim reminds us:

The growth of independent churches means that world Christianity—at least the half which is not part of the Catholic Church—is increasingly fragmented. The World Council of Churches is made up mainly of historic Protestant and Orthodox churches. The independent churches by their nature are not inclined to join, so that constant efforts need to be made to remember that these are the most rapidly growing churches in the world.<sup>78</sup>

74. Connie Ho Yan Au, “Asian Ecumenism from a Pentecostal Perspective,” in *Asian Handbook for Theological Education and Ecumenism*, ed. Hope Antone et al. (Oxford: Regnum, 2013) 84–93, at 84.

75. Richard Howell, “Asian Ecumenism from Evangelical Perspective,” in *Asian Handbook*, 80–83, at 80.

76. Kirsteen Kim, “Mission’s Changing Landscape: Global Flows and Christian Movements,” *International Review of Mission* 100 (2011) 244–67, at 253.

77. *Ibid.*

78. *Ibid.* 254.



## The Ongoing Pilgrimage

The pluralism and fragmentation within World Christianity makes the already difficult ecumenical pilgrimage all the more challenging. Some Evangelical churches not only have no centers; they may also be anti-center as well. If the ecumenical movement is a centripetal force, drawing churches together, these Evangelicals sometimes serve as centrifugal forces, pulling them away, especially from the center. At Busan in November 2013 hundreds of Christians were demonstrating daily outside the complex where the WCC assembly was being held; they carried banners and placards with messages such as “WCC is from the devil” and “WCC kills the church of Christ.” They were members of other Korean churches and were protesting not only the assembly but the very idea and existence of the ecumenical movement. Siga Arles, director of the Centre for Contemporary Christianity in Bangalore, puts these actions into perspective: “Historically a sense of distrust has been implanted in the minds of the ‘evangelicals’ about the ‘ecumenicals’—as not rooted in the authority of the Bible—as not committed to evangelism and church growth and—as not promoting conversion.”<sup>79</sup> In this context some of these Evangelicals, mostly from more recently established churches, are vehemently opposed to the ecumenical movement, at least in its present configuration. The opposition makes the task of Christian unity even more demanding, especially if one has to reach out to an antagonistic party or someone who sincerely believes you are working against the Christian cause.

Besides the “anti-ecumenicals,” some other churches are also wary of the WCC and the mainline churches because the latter continue to operate along confessional lines. The wary churches are principally the independent churches that wish to remain so. Most of the newly established churches in China are of this genre. As Bishop K. H. Ting, who once headed the government-approved Three-Self Patriotic Movement of the Protestant Church in China, once said, “We Chinese Christians have chosen the road of post-denominational unity, not because we are better than anyone else, but because we live in our particular historical situation.”<sup>80</sup> The Three-Self Movement does not include self-isolation as one of its practices, and so the Chinese Church has no intention of shunning the worldwide Christian communion. However, these Chinese Christians are at the same time cautious:

Since the churches re-opened in 1979, fellowship and friendship between the churches in China and worldwide have been widely established and developed. On the one hand, we appreciate very much that more and more churches overseas respect our independence and assist us sincerely in building up our churches on the basis of equality, publicity and legality. On the other hand, we always appeal to foreign churches and missionaries to “not go so far

79. Siga Arles, “Relations between Ecumenicals and Evangelicals,” in *Asian Handbook* 94–106, at 94.

80. K. H. Ting, “Fourteen Points from Christians in the People’s Republic of China to Christians Abroad,” *A New Beginning*, Canada-China Programme of the Canadian Council of Churches (1983) 113, as quoted in “The Queue: A Symbol of Emerging Christianity in China,” the Bible Society of India, [http://www.bsind.org/Christan\\_China.html](http://www.bsind.org/Christan_China.html).

as to attempt to revive denominational feelings and loyalties, thus inviting misunderstanding and unpleasantness.”<sup>81</sup>

As we can see from just these two profiles of the new face of World Christianity, the ecumenical movement is indeed confronted with new challenges today. Establishing a basis for engagement is already an uphill climb. But, like any relationship, ecumenism takes time to nurture, and patience is a key ingredient. A group member of GETI in Busan, whom I was mentoring, comes from the Pentecostal tradition; she indicated that, within her own context, Roman Catholics are not considered Christians. But at the end of two weeks of daily interactions, of mutual learning, and especially of table fellowship, her farewell message to me was an open invitation to come and lecture at her seminary! It is within this framework that we can understand ecumenism as truly a pilgrimage. It can be a long and tedious journey, with its share of headaches and heartaches but many pleasant and life-giving moments as well. That is why it is called a pilgrimage. Konrad Raiser’s wisdom helps us appreciate why the WCC adopted the image of the pilgrimage to describe the ecumenical movement:

The “pilgrimage” is a dynamic image suggesting a way to be traveled together. . . . The way traveled together is more important than the goal. . . . The image of the pilgrimage opens the horizon of the assembly beyond the institutional concerns of the WCC. . . . The image of the pilgrimage finally takes us beyond the structures and institutions of the organized ecumenical movement.<sup>82</sup>

Journeying together is perhaps what is needed for the ongoing pilgrimage of the ecumenical movement, especially in light of the reality of Christianity’s numerical southward shift and the advent of World Christianity. Emphasis should not be placed so much on the fruits as on the actual journey and ongoing dialogue. Activities are not confined to those within, but extend beyond institutional boundaries, including those of other religious traditions. This is the new context within which Southern Christianity is growing and invites a new vision for ecumenism. This new vision sees ecumenism not so much as a task to be fulfilled but as a way of being and relating across church and religious lines. In other words, pilgrimage is focused less on content and more on praxis or method.

Within Roman Catholicism this new vision in some way correlates with the emphasis coming from Rome and the Asian bishops. From Rome, inspired by *Ut unum sint*, Cardinal Walter Kasper, long-time president of the PCPCU, introduced and promoted the method of receptive ecumenism.<sup>83</sup> Acknowledging that the ecumenical efforts of

81. Gu Mengfei, “Chinese Churches on the Way towards Unity,” WCC, <http://archived.oikoumene.org/programmes/the-wcc-and-the-ecumenical-movement-in-the-21st-century/relationships-with-member-churches/60th-anniversary/contest/essay-the-post-denominational-era.html>. See n. 80 for the reference to the internal quotation.

82. Raiser, “Busan Assembly” 4–5.

83. “The Call to Ecumenical Learning: Durham 2006 and Onwards,” The Society for Ecumenical Studies, <http://sfes.faithweb.com/0711receptive.html>.

the past decades have more or less reached an impasse in what has been called an “ecumenical winter,” Kasper’s proposal is that we continue to be committed to the conversations. What is different, however, is that instead of focusing on the gifts each church brings to the table, we now turn our attention to what each church can learn from the other communities. For the RCC, this is called “Catholic Learning.”<sup>84</sup> The church becomes not so much an *ecclesia docens* (a teaching church) as an *ecclesia discens* (a learning church). The Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences, in the meantime, has been promoting the “triple dialogue” as a method not only for doing theology but also for being church in Asia.<sup>85</sup> Asian bishops use this term to invite Christians—all of them—to dialogue with the poor, the religions, and the cultures of Asia. The dialogue process is best explained by an image used by Indian theologian Stanley Samartha, first director of WCC’s subunit for Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies, in describing the postcolonial church. He refers to the image of the bullock-cart to describe what a contextualized and dialogical church entails.<sup>86</sup> For the bullock-cart to move forward it has to be grounded on Asian soil and interact with all the ground realities. In a similar manner, the triple dialogue entails the church’s being in touch with the poor, the religions, and the cultures of Asia—not so much as preacher or teacher but as pilgrim and servant. She must be, as Pope Francis advises, a church with “the smell of the sheep,” serving as a “field hospital after battle,” walking with the people, learning with them, and engaging with all to promote harmonious living, especially among communities of different religions. The task and method of the new ecumenism calls on Christians to be in constant engagement and dialogue with the realities of their own contexts. In today’s world where the many poor, the many religions, and the many cultures are not merely confined to Asia but are very much present in the rest of the world as well, the vision of the triple dialogue applies to the entire Christian communion, including the ecumenical movement.

If Christians embrace the vision of receptive ecumenism and of the triple dialogue as the ecumenical methodology for the 21st century, they will not only be working alongside one another for the sake of God’s kingdom but will be doing so together and with the poor and their neighbors of other faiths as well. Ecumenism would then be transcending the boundaries of church and Christianity and could become the hope of all humankind. The *oikoumene* would then truly represent the whole inhabited world. Even though this might seem like an *ad extra* vision and involvement, it will surely help facilitate the unity of the church. Denominational and doctrinal differences would be secondary concerns when Christians of different churches can witness together to the name of Jesus and in the name of God.

It is from the perspective of receptive ecumenism and of the triple dialogue that the theme of WCC 10, which is the prayer “God of life, lead us to justice and peace,” will

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84. Ibid.

85. Edmund Kee-Fook Chia, “Toward an Asian Theology of Dialogue,” in *Edward Schillebeeckx and Interreligious Dialogue: Perspectives from Asian Theology* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2012) 127–50, at 133.

86. Stanley Samartha, *One Christ—Many Religions: Toward a Revised Christology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991) 116.

become meaningful, not only for the Christian community but for all peoples of good will as well. When Christians are able to bring to reality God's abundant life and a world of justice and peace, then the prayer of Jesus "that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you" (Jn 17:21, NIV) will apply as much to the world's human community as to the Christian community.

### **Author biography**

Edmund Kee-Fook Chia, originally from Malaysia, received his PhD from the University of Nijmegen, The Netherlands. He is currently on the faculty of the Australian Catholic University in Melbourne where he also serves as coordinator for interreligious dialogue. From 2004 to 2011 he was at the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago where he last served as Associate Professor and Chair of the Doctrinal Studies Department. Prior to that, from 1996 to 2004, he was the executive secretary of ecumenical and interreligious affairs for the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences. He has recently published "Interfaith Learning in a Religiously Plural World," in *Reflecting on and Equipping for Christian Mission*, ed. Knud Jørgensen et al. (2015); "Sharing the Joy of the Gospel in Asia through Dialogue," *Asian Horizons* 8.3 (2014); and "Contextualizing *Evangelii Gaudium* in Asia," in *Doing Contextual Theologies in Asia*, ed. Wati Longchar (2014). Forthcoming are "Receptive Ecumenism through Asia's Triple Dialogue Theology," *Pacifica* 28 (2015); and "Glimpses of Schillebeeckx in Asian Theological Hermeneutics," in *Grace, Governance, and Globalization: Theology and Public Life*, ed. Lieven Boeve et al. (Bloomsbury).