

# GROWING Together

Ninth Series

## “FOR THE CONVERSION OF THE CHURCHES”

A little over two years ago an interchurch group of theologians and pastors in France, called the Groupe des Dombes, published a study entitled *“For the Conversion of the Churches”*. The authors urge the Christian churches and denominations – all of us – to take to heart the call to and need of “conversion”.

Conversion has three levels. **Personal** conversion is the individual response to God’s call to us in Christ: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.” (Mk. 1:15) NRSV.

**Church** conversion is the effort of the whole Church to renew itself and become more faithful to its mission. This dimension of conversion is expressed in the axiom *Ecclesia semper reformanda* (the Church is always in need of being reformed).

**Denominational** conversion is “the ecumenical effort by which a Christian denomination purifies and enriches its own heritage with a view to recovering full fellowship with the other denominations.” (Parag. 2)\*

### Denominational identity and conversion

Identity and conversion go together:

*“Far from excluding each other,  
identity and conversion call each other forth:  
there is no Christian identity without conversion;  
conversion is essential to the Church;  
our denominations deserve the name Christian  
only if they open themselves to the demand of conversion.”* (Parag. 8)\*

We are living at a time when churches are seeking/claiming strong denominational identity. Legitimate as this may be, it can lead to self-justifying attitudes if pursued without interior conversion. Institutional self-righteousness tends to reject the ecumenical movement as the great threat against pure and hard denominational identity.

“It is not a matter of losing one’s heritage, but rather opening up to the heritage of others.”

The various denominations “become a grace of God for the whole Church” only when they seek with other denominations the fullness of truth and faithfulness which is greater than all of them. (Parag. 46)\* They are called to be open to each other, to allow themselves to be influenced by the values of others. It is not a matter of losing one’s heritage, but rather opening up to the heritage of others. Finally, each denomination must ask itself “whether the judgment it makes on others is truly based on the Gospel.” (Parag. 48)\* If we accept the common need for institutional conversion in our denomination, we will become more accurate and generous in our assessment of each other.

“Let the same mind be in you  
that was in Christ Jesus.”

St. Paul calls the churches to imitate Christ: “let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus...he emptied himself...humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death...” (Phil. 2:5-8) NRSV

“Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches”. (Rev. 3:6) NRSV

\*For the Conversion of the Churches in French), Centurion 1991

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### For reflection and discussion

1. Name 2 or 3 ways in which you think your denomination is being quite faithful to the gospel.
2. Suggest 2 or 3 areas in which you think your denomination is being called to conversion.

GROWING TOGETHER is a series of five monthly Sunday bulletin inserts for the ecumenical education of Christ’s faithful.

COMMENTS OR QUESTIONS?

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