I. ECUMENISM

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Some idea of the diversity of ecumenical situations in which Grail members are involved is given in the recent issue of the Grail Review on ecumenism (Vol. VIII, No. 4). The experience of the participants called for a discussion of ecumenism on two different levels: relations with other Christians and relations with non-Christians. For all, one of the most challenging preparatory documents was a series of contributions from Protestant women expressing their desire for closer collaboration with the Grail and suggesting possibilities for ecumenical groupings to be formed on a trial basis for the coming period.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Towards a basic ecumenical formation for all participants

1. We affirm that the Grail shares in a conscious way (cf. Par. 2) in the Church's mission of reconciling all men to one another and to God, her mission of bringing unity wherever men are divided from one another. Ecumenism is simply another way of speaking about this mission, expressing a concern for the whole world and its oneness in Christ. The search for the fullness of unity among Christians is one essential aspect of this mission; it means enabling the one People of God to give an undivided witness within the world — "that they may be one, so that the world may believe".

We affirm that particularly in an encounter with people of non-Christian religions and cultures — where the acceptance of Christ is often primarily experienced in terms of "not peace but the sword" (cf. Mt 10:34-36) — the Grail shares in the mission of the Church to witness to the primacy of the transcendent reality and to the mystery of the religious dimension in man.

\textsuperscript{1}) Here as elsewhere in the issue, delegates are identified according to the country they were representing rather than their country of origin. Ex officio delegates are so indicated, and non-voting delegates invited as experts are designated by E and country of origin.
possibility of limited open communion on particular occasions, in order to express more fully both our unity and disunity.

f. We affirm the basic link between mission and unity, and the scandal of a divided Church in the face of a world desperately in need of reconciliation. Where, in a non-Christian culture, there exists among Christians of different denominations the same basic concept of the mission of Christianity, and the same approach to the religious values found in the local culture, Grail teams should as far as possible strive for mutual support and collaboration with other Christians. This could include participation in common service projects.

Exploring the possibility of non-Catholic participation in the Grail

7. a. Where the Grail is present in a non-Christian culture, participation of non-Christians and non-believers in the Grail might be possible and desirable — in some cases, even essential — depending on the situation. We readily endorse the recommendation in the “Structures” that there be full freedom to work this out according to the demands and possibilities of the situation (cf. p. 3).

b. Protestant-Anglican-Orthodox participation in the Grail (while we speak below specifically of Protestant participation, similar considerations would obviously apply in the case of Anglican and Orthodox women). A number of Protestant women in North America, Europe and South Africa have expressed an interest in participating in the Grail; and as a consequence we are forced to face up to this new question not only in a theoretical way, but with some urgency. For many of us in contact with these women, the question now is no longer, “Why Protestant participation?” but rather, “Why not?”

A number of reasons impel us to consider this question more profoundly:

i) The initiative of these committed Protestant women, who have discovered that they share with the Grail basic Christian values and concerns, a common sense of mission, a common concern as women, and the possibility for a kind of community which they do not find in their own churches of which many of them seek today on an ecumenical basis. (This is particularly true of Protestant single women).

ii) Similarly, we who have known these women have been greatly enriched by our contact with them — enriched precisely as Christians, by their gifts; and we believe that the Grail as a whole would likewise be enriched by Protestant participation.

iii) We are impelled also by a concern for greater relevance and effectiveness in our Christian witness in the world — in milieux increasingly impatient with traditional denominational divisions and with present forms of the institutional Church. The question is increasingly being posed, “faith or no faith”, rather than “Catholic or Protestant”.

We would propose that in the next four years small experimental groups be established where feasible and desirable, of roughly half Catholics and half Protestants, to share their concerns in the deepest possible way, and to consider more specifically the questions involved in non-Catholic participation in the Grail, the difficulties on the side of both of the Catholics and of the non-Catholics. In addition, interested non-Catholic Christian women could be incorporated more fully in existing Grail programs, social projects, study groups, times of prayer and retreat — and where possible, be included as well in our residential teams. Such efforts, while not committing either the Grail or the participants to any further course of action, would enable us to explore this question in a much more realistic way than we can now. We ask the support of the whole Grail for those teams which feel called to engage in such experimental efforts, and an openness among all to the possibility of our becoming a Christian, rather than specifically Catholic movement, if the Holy Spirit should be leading us to this.

Captive Orthodox girls working at the Grail Center in Abkmin (Upper Egypt) in a local craft program that combines aspects of ecumenism, social development, education. Modern girls are also beginning to come.
2. The Grail has always understood its task as one of creating community among men, and first of all, being itself a sign and witness of unity through the coming together of women of different races and cultures and backgrounds, in a common life and effort in Christ. We hope that in this time the Grail can affirm more specifically the ecumenical dimension of this vocation, reaching out both to other Christians and to non-Christians.

3. The work of ecumenism in the specific sense of seeking unity among Christians is the task of perhaps only a few within the Grail, but we affirm that all within the movement must have an ecumenical attitude and orientation which affects whatever work they are doing. This ecumenical attitude we understand in terms of fundamental openness to and respect for "the other", an appreciation for diversity while seeking an underlying unity with others, an effort to break down barriers between people (and first of all, between oneself and others). It means a willingness to receive from and to be changed by the other, a purification and deepening of one's own faith and attitudes.

In the context of the non-Christian world, ecumenism implies as well an appreciation of the values of other religions and cultures, and an encouraging and evoking of the religious dimension in these cultures. We affirm that this attitude is essential in the Grail's mission in such cultures.

4. Grail formation and continuing education both of ourselves and of others must include the fostering of such a basic ecumenical attitude, which will be expressed differently according to the situation. While study of the divided Church and of other religions can be helpful, we believe that the most essential ingredient is the providing of opportunities for personal encounter with people whose tradition is different from our own. Concrete ecumenical experience of this kind almost inevitably leads to a change of attitude. In the case of other Christians, it leads to a discovery that the other is first of all a fellow-Christian, that what we share with him is ultimately more important than what separates us. Such experience of the other impels us to seek a deeper unity with him, to break down the walls which separate us.

In the case of dialogue with non-Christians and non-believers, this personal encounter will often lead to a deeper awareness of the work of the Spirit in all men, thus evoking in us another dimension of faith and hope for the coming of the Kingdom.

5. We recognize that a primary sphere of ecumenical action for the Grail lies within the Catholic Church, in the areas of renewal inspired by the Vatican Council: renewal of the Church's life, worship, structures, theology, religious education, etc. Also essential today, at a time when the significant divisions among Christians are often confessional rather than between the Churches, is an active concern for promoting a more profound unity within the Catholic Church — unity between hierarchy and faithful, laity and clergy, progressives and conservatives. We urge Grail teams, in all their ecumenical efforts, to be in dialogue with Catholic theologians who are working in this field.

Contact and collaboration with other Christians and with non-Christians

6. We recommend that Grail teams seek to develop in their own situation various forms of contact and collaboration with other Christians, and where possible, with non-Christians.

a. As Grail we have always seen as a part of our task the bringing of people together in an atmosphere conducive to real meeting at a deep level. We urge Grail teams to make a special effort to bring about such meeting between Catholics and other Christians, and between Christians and non-Christians. We recommend especially overnight or weekend meetings, where people can meet one another in a living-together experience, with common prayer, study, work, recreation — sharing common concerns, meeting on the level of faith and values.

b. As individuals and as teams, we should seek out persons of other traditions who are involved in similar work or professions, in order to share common concerns. While many of us are already doing this, we recommend that we attempt to reach out in this way more consciously and on a broader scale. We recommend especially reaching out to other Christian and non-Christian women and women's organizations, in an effort to explore areas of mutual concern.

c. Collaboration in the sphere of social action and service is one of the most important ways of coming together, for here we are not only self-consciously facing one another, but already standing together in common witness and service in the world.

d. Common study and dialogue, ecumenical discussion groups, ought to be fostered — common study of Scripture (some have found this profitable with non-Christians), of contemporary religious thought, of the Church-world relationship, etc. In most cases it is advisable to place the emphasis at first on what unites us, since most people enter such a group with a sharper awareness of our separation from one another.

e. Prayer for unity, and especially common prayer with other Christians, is greatly encouraged — as are the above points — by the Vatican Decree on Ecumenism, and should play an ever-increasing role in our prayer life. Such prayer both expresses the oneness in Christ which already exists and at the same time helps to intensify this unity. At this moment Christians are still divided in their celebration of the Eucharist; but where appropriate, we ought to explore the
My spiritual journey is not an exceptional one, although as the one living it from one point to another, I never could have predicted or anticipated the twists and turns, the surprising guiding lights and the various callings that led me to unexpected places. One of those unexpected places is The Grail, which I first experienced twenty-some years ago. At that time I had been newly introduced to church life after 20 years of disdain and disillusionment—but “the church” to me always was a Protestant church of one kind or another. I knew from the beginning that the Grail in the U.S. had begun as a Catholic laywomen’s movement and that it had become ecumenical in 1969. It wasn’t much of an issue in the Grail circles I traveled in because we talked issues more than religion and we used rituals but not proclamations or creeds.

It is obvious to me that I would not be in the Grail if it had not moved forward with the ideas and experimentation that were written about in the 1961 paper, as must be true for other women in the Grail—Protestant, Jewish, Buddhist, Hindu or unaffiliated (“spiritual but not religious”). The only time I ever felt different from the majority of Grail members was when someone innocently said that I increased the diversity of the Grail—I had not thought of my Protestant background as significant to my identity or making me very different from my Grail sisters—perhaps the blindness of being a part of the dominant majority in this American culture!

So the experiment that was proposed in the paper is ongoing. In my experience, involvement in the Grail is tangential to religious affiliation. Yet from the beginning I was drawn to and influenced by the Grail women who created unique liturgies and rituals, observed the liturgical year of the church, talked of people like Dorothy Day and the Berrigan brothers and the mystics as well as theologians, the arts, the environment, spirituality, and politics. I learned from and have great respect for many Catholic traditions and practices but never felt by not being Catholic that I was deterred from full involvement in the Grail. The women I met early on in the Grail and those I continue to meet live the radical and “fundamental openness to and respect for the other” that is mentioned in the Ecumenism document. The thread that runs through the years and the variety of experiences encountered by Grail women in my estimation is that we are all on a journey. We are all searching and seeking after truth and goodness and justice. With those spend the most time, there is commonly held value of deep personal integrity and honesty in sharing our journeys on our way and our struggles caring for each other and building each other up to continue the work of bringing light and peace into a hurting world.

I resonate with the 50-year-old expression of the Grail mission as seeking reconciliation for all persons outside of religions—still believe we do witness this mystery within ourselves and in the best impulses of human beings. 

My spiritual reflection on Ecumenism and Interfaith Dialogue for the International Grail

By Lucy Jones, USA
Religions can be understood as institutions that put up walls to define who is in and who is out. Alternately, one's religion can be seen as her deep-seated worldview—something that everyone has, consciously or not—which is the understanding of reality that is the ground of one's perceptions and actions. The Grail I met in 1990 broadened my understanding of religion. Its encouragement of women's spiritual leadership opened for me a deeper exploration of my own faith. The Grail was a significant part of my formation in becoming a United Methodist clergywoman.

The search goes on not only in exploring the other that is beyond us, but also in exploring the depths of what we call of “double belonging.”

Another way to enjoy personal encounters is to participate in an existing interfaith group. The Dutchess County Interfaith Council has worked on creating interreligious relations for 40 years. I attend a Story Circle at a different house of worship each month. Besides listening to and “confessing” to the people how we relate to our faith groups, we are all invited to share stories of faith traditions from our cultures and what our faith means to one or more spiritual practices—Buddhist, Jewish, Earth Religion, Women's Christian—on a day retreat.

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The article on Ecumenism and Interreligious dialogue written by the Grail women 50 years ago is very interesting. I was struck by the article, the Grail concern for Ecumenism and interreligious dialogue that carried the prophetic mission of the Church 50 years ago. The advocacy for unity and mutual understanding among people of different religious traditions by the Grail was crucial. This was based on the initiative to respect and accept other people with their differences, hence be able to work together using our different talents for the transformation of the world and for the glory of God. It is well articulated in the article that Grail women participate and encourage activities that have ecumenical dimension in order to explore more spiritual values.

In essence, the ecumenical movement aims to promote unity and mutual understanding among people of different religious traditions. It is known that the Grail has been working with people from different religious traditions and has been involved in various activities that focus on promoting unity and mutual understanding. It has been working with people from different religious traditions in order to explore more spiritual values.

Recently from 18-25 January we held a prayer for Christian Unity at the University. It was an interesting experience because opportunity was given to different Christian denominations and independent African Churches studying at the University to prepare a prayer session. In one prayer session organized by ACK (Anglican Church of Kenya), the pastor said that division in the Church is a scandal and that love and forgiveness should be part of the Christmas celebration. Women in this group came from different religious traditions and all spent time praying and reflecting on their faith. The group included a group of women fighting against AIDS in Kilimanjaro (Kiwakuki). The group underwent training so that they can help AIDS patients and their families through counseling. Women in this group came from different faith traditions and all focused on campaign against the spread of HIV/AIDS through visiting different groups of people, schools and colleges. I remember working with two Muslim women who collaborated with me so well in visiting the schools and homes of the affected people. We prayed together for the success of our mission and united in prayer to live in peace and harmony with others. I have learned that ecumenical cooperation is strong in the African continent and that there are many social, economic and spiritual activities that focus on promoting unity and mutual understanding among people of different religious traditions.
I.

Grail women in Germany are concerned that the Christian faith could lose its life-giving and unifying strength not only in the church, but also within the Grail. This seems to endanger our mission to empower women towards a living faith and transformative action in society. This situation challenges us to reflect our faith in Jesus Christ, the risen Son of God, more deeply and to trust in his spirit of unconditional love for each human being more openly. We are also called together to materialize anew the vision of a society marked by justice, peace and solidarity. Inspired by this vision we are committed to transforming the church and the Grail.

II.

Our context is culturally determined by three factors: secularization, multiculturalism and an augmentation of communication. These factors have a determining influence on people's everyday life, their behavior and their relations, their personal and political decisions and value systems. The media offer virtual experiences and shape the way people deal with their own experiences of reality. The media have a determining influence on people's awareness of the differences between the milieus and threatening the chances of the development of mutual understanding and communication between the different cultures and milieus. The media flood/overload extend the realms of experience and at the same time threaten personal relationships. The complexity of life in a highly technological world makes communication difficult and makes it difficult to maintain one's own life and decision-making.

Secularization: The number of Christians is continually decreasing. At least one third of the German population does not belong to any church or denomination. Two thirds of the East German population are not baptized and this has been the case for several generations, a fact known as "stable peoples' atheism." Every year more than 200,000 people are leaving the Christian churches. As a consequence the Christian churches are losing influence and interest in the public realm. The Christian faith becomes more and more a matter of private life only and at the same time is considered irrelevant by the general public.

Multiculturalism: Due to refugees and immigration the German society is gradually losing its homogeneity. According to ethnic and family backgrounds, education and income different cultures and milieus with their own religious values, needs and forms of expressions have developed. The differences between the milieus are increasing and threatening the chances of the development of mutual understanding and communication between the different cultures and milieus. The media flood/overload extend the realms of experience and at the same time threaten personal relationships.

Augmentation of communication: The number of Christians is continually decreasing. At least one third of the German population does not belong to any church or denomination. Two thirds of the East German population are not baptized and this has been the case for several generations, a fact known as "stable peoples' atheism." Every year more than 200,000 people are leaving the Christian churches.

III.

Christian Identity and Sharing a Common Path

Grail Women on an Ecumenical Pilgrimage
small and parishes are being dissolved in great numbers. And thirdly the relatively high standard of living (in Germany) in combination with an extensive social security system, however, is more and more threatened by economic globalization. Because of the historic experiences of inflation, war and displacement people's concern for material security plays an important role in political discussions.

III.

By reason of the (Christian)-Catholic roots of the Grail we understand ourselves as an international/universal/global and as such also an ecumenical movement. The Greek word "oikos", from which the word ecumenism is derived means "the whole house" as well as "the inhabited world". The key question for us as Grail members is: Can this perspective of a 3rd Ecumenism help to operate in a de facto 3rd Ecumenism situation at work and in cultural life.

This is called the 3rd type of Ecumenism.

In view of this crucial question further questions arise:

1. Is this a last step away from any religion or a first step into a new understanding of

2. Who and what is meant by this 3rd Ecumenism?

- A new form of a minimal religion?
- A spontaneous unreflected Ecumenism?
- Are the people concerned interested, alienated or never touched by any denomination?

3. Is there a chance of "Christianising" them?

4. For encountering people of the 3rd Ecumenism what can be learned from experiences of dialogue?

5. What kind of understanding of mission is needed in such a situation?

The concept of Ecumenism has developed since the beginning of the 20th century. Today East Germany still operates in a de facto 3rd Ecumenism situation. On account of the secularization of people the we often already experience of other religions. From the discovery of "something more", people search for dialogue and denominational authorities. Yet the discovery of "something more" plays a role as well, and denominational authorities have a critical distance from religious absolutism. The concept of Ecumenism is a new phenomenon, particularly to be observed in East Germany and in the Czech Republic. However, since it is a phenomenon due to secularization it is also to be found in secularized Western societies. With secularization increasing the number of spiritual people not related to any religion will also gain in importance. The 3rd Ecumenism is a new phenomenon, particularly to be observed in Eastern Germany and Western Europe.

The key question for us as Grail members is: Can this perspective of a 3rd Ecumenism help to understand our situation in the Grail and clarify our "ecumenical programme"?

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IV. How do we as Christians encounter, cooperate and live with people that have no religion or a denomination? It seems important to acknowledge that already now in the context of ecumenism we are having many contacts with them – in the family, in the workplace and also in the Grail.

The theologians quoted are looking at these contact points in view of the “basic actions of faith” (Grundvollziehungen): diaconia, martyria (witness), liturgia and coinonia (communion). Using these categories we can discover the challenges they hold for us.

Diaconia: In the realm of charity goals of Christians and their organisations are to a large extent identical with those of the “humanists” and allow for practical cooperation. In the realm of culture it is more difficult e.g. when the building of a mosque in Germany or a Christian church in Turkey are concerned. However, the buildings of the former Cistercian Women Monastery in the then GDR (Helfta) were saved by a non-believer thanks to his respect for its cultural value.

In the realm of politics issues of power and anxiety over losses often prevail. Traditional church – party constellations can prevent cooperation when they are still strong.

Martyria: In this field of faith witnesses dialogue is asked first of all, particularly dialogue at eye level that requires a capacity of listening as well as one of a language beyond religious phrases. Therefore people involved have to be “culturally bilingual.

This is a difficult requirement in a time when we speak of “religious illiteracy” spreading in our country. Yet content is just as important. Non-religious people provoke Christians by asserting “There is no need of God”. This implies a warning for Christians not to functionalize religion or faith in God e.g. as a provider of values. We easily forget, that this has already been criticized by Magister Eckehart in the 13th century as “milk and cheese piety”, when God is loved like a cow. Teresa of Avila, too, asked not to seek consolations from God but to rather seek the God of consolation.

Liturgia: There are various opportunities when Christians and Non-Religious come together for rituals, which is always a difficult event yet can also be inspiring, e.g. the peace prayers in the GDR in the fall of 1989, or the celebrations of “Passages of Life” (Feier der Lebenswende) in the Cathedral of Erfurt, where non-religious highschool students are invited; after discussing the main issues of growing up they invite their parents and friends. But also the communal (E.) services, e.g. on the last day of the ecumenical “Passages of Life” (Passagen der Leue).

Coinonia: Any faith builds community, and living in a global, interconnected world where borders are no longer relevant...

Furthermore, there are various opportunities when Christians and Non-Religious come together...
Germany: In several cities "Thomas masses" are celebrated – a service with an agape to which especially those who doubt are invited.

Netherlands: Communities of those who believe in "something" (Iets-ism) called "Renais- Sense-Communities hosted by the Remonstratensors, a modernized branch of the Reformed Church.

USA: Interfaith – Movement, that also ordains specifically trained ministers.

V. Our Identity and Mission today

1. Ecumenism consists of a plurality of cultures, religions and spiritualities. What can be learned from the 1st Ecumenism is, that there will be no "return to Rome", but what we can hope for is a "reconciled diversity" and from the 2nd Ecumenism we can deduce that "Christianising" is not the object of interreligious dialogue. Even within the Christian Churches there is always a need for more and deeper inculturation in other than Christian cultures and also extending it to other social milieus. All this will cause plurality to grow within the Churches e.g. by means of new rites…

2. Mission today has to be seen in a new context. "One cannot think of mission without ecumenism" (Bishop Noack, prot.). The ecumenical aim is "that the world may believe" (John 17, 20), the commandment "be one" is for the sake of this aim. The mission without ecumenism equals part of the ecumenism. The ecumenical aim is "that the world may believe" (John 17, 20).

3. Questions then: is how can we be one in such a way that the world will believe?

4. Mission today has to be seen in a new context. One cannot think of mission without ecumenism. By means of new rites…

5. Together we should try to find a way towards a reconciliation that is marked by the fact that by the Spirit something new can grow out from it.

These reflections are mainly based on the following two articles, which I reflected and summarized in view of the present discussion in the Grail of its identity "being rooted in the Christian faith" and at the same time open to those who follow another path.

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Marburg, November 2010

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