

Why it Should be Called Basic Ecclesial Community?

A Theological Interpretation of the Terminologies of BEC

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Introduction

Just as in the case of the Mystery of the Church, the Basic Ecclesial Community (BEC) also is not easy to define. Its life and nature are too complex to be simply defined by any terminology.¹ Therefore, there are innumerable names given to BEC such as *floating parishes, ecclesial groups, Free Church, underground Church, informal communities, small communities, ecclesial cells, spontaneous communities, the second Church,*² *informal groups, underground Church, fraternities, critical groups,*³ *neighbourhood communities, groups of families, community organizations,*⁴ *informal basic groups, free churches, second church, parallel church, floating communities,*⁵ *the living ecclesial communities, the ecclesial life communities (communautés ecclésiales vivantes), the small christian communities,*⁶ *the basic christian communities and the basic ecclesial communities.* After having read much literature on BEC, we have found out that the name Basic Christian Community (BCC) is commonly used in Asia and in the English literature and “Basic Ecclesial

Community” (BEC) is almost unanimously used in Latin American countries. Latin America is the birth place of BEC and it is the place where BEC acquired universal attention and began to spread to all other continents. Hence we all the more prefer the name BEC. We take into consideration only three names BEC (Basic Ecclesial Community), BCC (Basic Christian Community) and SCC (Small Christian Community) and we avoid all other expressions as they are too generic. Among these three names we first and foremost incline to avoid the name SCC, since this expression is a quantitative one rather than a qualitative one. Small is something referring to a quantity as opposed to big or large. Whereas Basic is a qualitative term referring to the irrevocable character of a person or irreversible quality of a thing. Between the other two names namely BEC and BCC we prefer the name BEC, as this expression is very close to the life and nature of these communities.

I. The Theological Importance of Being “Ecclesial”

1. **First** of all, the word “Ecclesial” suggests that it is a community summoned by God Himself. The word “**Ekklesia**” means “the Messianic and Eschatological people of God convoked by God Himself.”⁷ It is not an arbitrary gathering, it is not someone who gathers the people; it is God who gathers, assembles and forms the people into a Basic Community. It is the same God who once gathered together the people of Israel into a community,⁸ as now calls the marginalized people to assemble as a community in their inhuman situations. Hence Basic Community is a community, which is called forth and convoked by God. Therefore it should be called Basic **Ecclesial** Community.

2. **Second**, the word Ecclesial stresses more on the “Unity of Faith”⁹ or “Communion in the Faith”¹⁰ or “oneness in the Faith”¹¹ rather than mere faith in Jesus Christ. It is true that Jesus Christ is the centre of all the Basic Communities and any ecclesial bond is due to the Faith in Jesus Christ.¹² Faith in Jesus is the common element which unites his believers into one community irrespective of culture, language, nations etc.¹³ Moreover the

same faith in Jesus gives the believers a togetherness in seeking, understanding and accepting the faith itself. This process is called communion in faith. "Faith is given essentially as communion"¹⁴ This faith establishes a vertical communion with God and horizontal communion with those who share the same faith.¹⁵ Thus not mere faith, but rather the communion in faith eventually forms the believers into one community. "The common faith in Jesus Christ binds all Churches together"¹⁶ Faith cannot be individualistic. It is basically communitarian. More than the word "Christian" the word "Ecclesial" expresses this communion aspect of the faith.

3. **Third**, we prefer the word "Ecclesial" in order to emphasise the "Integral Message of Christ."¹⁷ Some communities are purely spiritual and some time these communities are purely worldly. At the same time these communities claim themselves to be Christian Communities; though they are far away from the Integral Message of Christ. "In developed countries such as United States renewal has so often meant reform of outward modes of ecclesial life such as the liturgy and the organizational models of the parish. Reform has not always meant something more profound and, of course, challenging: special outreach to the poor, a sharpening of interest in and a corresponding commitment to questions of social justice."¹⁸ Charismatic movements which inspired and triggered prayer groups everywhere,¹⁹ some feminist movements, which are fighting against the hierarchy especially on the question of women to priesthood²⁰ and some lay groups which are fighting for the approval for divorce, abortion etc.²¹ cannot be considered BEC; because they are far away from the integral Message of Jesus Christ. The communities in Italy, France, and Japan which claim themselves the title of Basic Communities are pseudo-Ecclesial Communities and the word "Ecclesial" can be applied only analogously to these communities, because they are one-sided, individualistic and purely spiritual and they are lacking vision and action in the global issue of social justice and political commitment. In other words these communities are not committed fully to living the "Integral Message" of Jesus Christ. For us the perfect Model for BEC are

those communities in Latin America, Africa, in Asia especially in the Philippines, Pakistan and India, because they are politically committed and spiritually oriented. These communities are rooted in social justice, as well as in spiritual renewal. In other words these communities are committed for integral humanism, total liberation and the total life of the Church. Thus these communities are living out the Integral Message of Jesus Christ. The communities in developed countries claiming to be Christian are actually far away from the Integral Message of Christ. As a result of this they are losing their communion with the Universal Church. "In Europe the Base communities, often having a different social origin are only communes and not communities, and so they are mistrusted by the hierarchy, and vice versa."²²

4. Fourth, we prefer the word "Ecclesial" in order to safeguard the communities from becoming mere "Sects."²³ We know there are many communities in the world, which claim that Jesus Christ is their centre. In reality they have become "sects" and "cults." The cult leaders take interest in a particular part of the Holy Bible and interpret it literally without connecting it with the integral message of Christ. They are sowing confusion by their activities.²⁴ Finally they and their followers end in tragedy.²⁵ For these communities too, Jesus and the Bible is the centre. Therefore, bearing the name "Christian" and saying that "Jesus is the centre" are not sufficient. They must be one with the Universal Church²⁶ and immersed in the integral message of Jesus Christ, otherwise there is a possibility of falling away from the integral message of Jesus Christ and becoming a sect within the Church or outside the Church. For us, to be ecclesial means to be Christian, but to be Christian may not mean to be ecclesial always. Hence we prefer the word "Ecclesial" in order to manifest to the world that these communities are part and parcel of the Church and imbued with the integral message of Jesus Christ.

5. Fifth, and very significantly, we prefer the word Ecclesial in order to stress the fact that the Church is the community of communion. The

Church as Sacrament is a mystery of communion, of God with human beings and of human beings among themselves. Where there is communion with God, we know there is communion with others (cf. 1 Jn 3, 6-7). This communion can be expressed through many or few symbols.²⁷ The communion among the Churches can be expressed in two ways.²⁸ First through symbols²⁹ (the celebration of the Sacraments, Liturgy, word of God, and especially the celebration of the Eucharist). The oneness, uniformity, and solidarity of the disciples of Jesus (communion of faith in Jesus) are manifested symbolically in the celebration of the Eucharist. "The Eucharist is the source of unity and the most perfect expression of the union of all the members of the Christian Communities."³⁰ Besides the celebration of the Eucharist, the BEC identifies itself with the Universal Church through the celebration of the Word of God, Worship, Liturgy etc. Second through the link-up with hierarchy, the BEC demonstrates that it is not an isolated Community, but rather a community within the Universal Church. It is in a parish and the parish is in a diocese and that diocese is in the Universal Church.³¹ Thus the link-up with the Universal Church is very much maintained and the co-ordination with the Pastors (Priest, Bishop Pope etc.) is safeguarded. It is at this point, Pope Paul VI insists that the BEC should have a link-up with the hierarchy. There are many Basic Communities especially in Europe (Italy, France and in USA) marked for their criticism and protest against the hierarchy.³² There are communities, which are purely sociological. Therefore Pope Paul VI condemned these kinds of attitudes in some Communities.

"Communities which separate themselves from the Church by their spirit of protest and damage its oneness may well call themselves "Basic Communities;" but in such cases the term is purely sociological in its thrust. It would be abuse of language for them to call themselves "Basic Ecclesial Communities."³³

The Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Paul VI *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, deploys the word "Ecclesial" to emphasise the oneness of the Church. Medellin, uses the word "Christian,"³⁴ but Puebla which was held 10 years after the

Medellin employs the word "Ecclesial." Medellin's focus on these communities was more sociological and religious than ecclesiological.³⁵

"We also saw a shift taking place in Brazil during the ten years between the Medellin and the Puebla Conference (1968-1979): from Basic Community (*comunidad de base*) to Basic Ecclesial Community (*comunidad eclesial de base*). The earlier Basic Community was base-level or grass-roots group with an ecclesial character, but the emphasis was on its sociological aspect and scope as an entity within the parish or in contrast to the latter. The Basic Ecclesial Community, as conceived and understood ever since the Puebla Conference, is far more markedly and consciously ecclesiological."³⁶

Thus, we see a growth in understanding of the ecclesial aspect of BEC in Latin America. In the Philippines too, we see an evolutionary growth in changing the nomenclature of these basic communities from "Christian" to "Ecclesial." First they preferred the name "Christian" in order to distinguish it from other social-political communities and to emphasise the fact of the centrality of Christ as the fundamental source and inspiration of the socio-political commitment. However, later on, they preferred the name "Ecclesial" as they realized the growing consciousness of the ecclesial dimension of these communities.³⁷ We feel that this is due to the growing consciousness of the ecclesial element of the communities. Thus, "the reality of basic community is much richer than can be expressed by any single term. On the other hand, one cannot do away with terms altogether, so one must select that which corresponds nearest to the reality. In our case, it is Basic Ecclesial community."³⁸ "Ecclesial" is crucial adjective, because it is precisely the term that makes explicit the identity of the BEC.³⁹

II. The Theological Importance and the Intrinsic Elements of the Community

1) Community is different from Family:

The sociologists do not agree to a unanimous conclusion about the definition of community. Each one differs in defining the concept. Hillary

points out 94 definitions about the word community.⁴⁰ The commonly accepted factor is that the community is one form of social life. The society is constituted of groups, associations, communities and families. Family is a primary social group⁴¹ and it is a natural institution.⁴² “It is a group of persons united by the ties of marriage, blood or adoption, constituting a single household.”⁴³ Though family is a community in a general sense, it cannot be a community in a strict sense. First of all its size is very small and the intensity of the relationship is very deep. Moreover there is no diversity and pluralism in the family. On the contrary the community is bigger in size and relationship among the members is not deep as in the family. Moreover there is diversity and pluralism in the community.⁴⁴

COMMUNITY	FAMILY
Big	Small
Friendship	Affinity
Diversity	Uniformity
Broader vision	Specialized vision

2) Community is not a group:

The community also differs from a group. The group is transitory, it terminates when its reason for existing is no longer necessary.⁴⁵ On the contrary, the community is an expression of a permanent, constant, stable social life.⁴⁶ The group is organized to respond to one problem and to intensify one specific dimension,⁴⁷ whereas the community responds to a global view of life such as religion, family, education, health, economy, politics etc.⁴⁸ The group is homogeneous; but the community is heterogeneous.⁴⁹ The group goes beyond friendship and tends to equalize the intimacy in the same rhythm.⁵⁰ On the contrary the community makes interpersonal relationships, basing on open-mindedness and always avoiding the ghetto-mentality and an elitist tendency.⁵¹

COMMUNITY	GROUP
Global	Specialized
Permanent	Transitory
Pluralistic	Uniformity
Friendship	Intimacy ⁵²

3) Community is not as same as the association:

The community is also different from an association. The role of an individual is determined and conditioned in an association. If the individual does well, he will be rewarded. If he does badly, he will be under estimated and even he may be dismissed from the association. Therefore Ferdinand Tonnies says "the association (Gesellschaft) is pursued on a common interest by deliberate choice."⁵³ On the contrary, according to Ferdinand Tonnies "the community (Gemeinschaft) is based on a common love arising from natural affinity."⁵⁴ In a community the individual has different roles to play⁵⁵ and he has no fear of being dismissed.⁵⁶

COMMUNITY	ASSOCIATION
Common love	Common interest
Spontaneous	Deliberate
Acceptance	Reward or Punishment
Various roles	Determined role

After analyzing the characteristics of the community we arrive at the following elements which constitute it as such. The intrinsic elements⁵⁷ of the community are:

- Common bond or goal
- Geographical proximity

- Interpersonal relationships
- Feeling of solidarity
- Completeness

a) **Common goal**: It is the common goal which internally binds together all the members as one community.⁵⁸ The more a member is committed to the goal, the more the community becomes dynamic. Thus the very survival of the community is based on the common goal.⁵⁹ Since we are dealing with the BEC, the common goal should be the goal of Jesus Christ. Jesus came to the world to proclaim the Kingdom of God. "The Son of Man spent His entire life going about proclaiming the characteristics of this kingdom that is a world acknowledging and experiencing the supremacy of love which is God."⁶⁰ The Kingdom message is His message. The kingdom values are His values.

He (Jesus) speaks confidently and authoritatively about God and His reigning. The Kingdom is here, in your midst! (Lk 17, 21). He is most compassionate over the multitude. He weeps for an individual (Jn 11, 35-36), He weeps for a whole city (Lk 19, 41-44). He wants to give them life. He calls the poor blessed, the Kingdom of God is theirs! (Lk 6, 20). The homeless, the hungry, the naked, the little ones, bear His face. Uncompromising in defending the little ones, his healing touch, forgiving words, signal the compassionate irruption of the Kingdom of God into our space and time.⁶¹

However in establishing the common goal, the BEC should go along with the Universal Church and its leaders. Thus the common goal of the BEC should be establishing *integral* humanism or kingdom values after the model of Jesus Christ, along with the Universal Church and its hierarchy.

b) **Geographical proximity**: It is this territorial proximity that differentiates a community from a group or an association. Territorial proximity is very important to facilitate a face to face dialogue, interpersonal relationships and interactions. In other words, geographical proximity means *living together in a limited area or in a same territory*, rather than coming

together or meeting together in a confined room or apartment. Regarding, BEC the geographical proximity means, "living of communion, whose size allows for a personal, fraternal contact among its members."⁶² Thus BEC radically differs from religious communities, groups, pious associations and movements within the Church.⁶³

c) Inter-personal relationship: Mere living together in a particular area does not create a community life. Without knowing, caring, loving the neighbour, the life cannot be called community life. "A community means its members feel with one another. A community devoid of feelings is not yet a community. It may be just a task force."⁶⁴ Therefore interpersonal relationship is essential even in a natural community. Interpersonal relationship means accepting, caring, sharing, knowing, strengthening and encouraging the other person. In this relationship, human person is taken as an end and not as a means; for the "human person stands above all things."⁶⁵ The *dignity* of a human person should be the basics for interpersonal relationship in BEC. "The dignity of the person is rooted in the two most fundamental facts; the first is the *creation* of the human person in the image and likeness of God (cf. Gen 2, 26); and the second is the *Incarnation* of Jesus Christ."⁶⁶ Likeness and Image of God means "to be like Yahweh who is the "Most High," and "Holy" and He has steadfast love (*hesed*)⁶⁷ for the people. Therefore as God is Holy, human person too is created in Holiness. Hence human person is dignified and honoured to the level of the dignity of the Lord. Incarnation means: God so loved the world that He sent His only Son (cf. Jn 3, 16) and so "we are now God's children" (cf. 1 Jn 3, 16). "The Son of God became man, so that the sons of men might become sons of God."⁶⁸ "In Christ, through Christ, man has acquired full awareness of his dignity of the heights to which he is raised, of the surpassing worth of his own humanity, and of the meaning of his existence."⁶⁹ All human persons are children of God. Having realized the dignity of the person, the early Christians lived a wonderful community life (cf. Acts 2, 42-47). For them the human person was important. Hence they shared what they were (being) and what they had (having).

d) **Feeling of Solidarity**: It is the result of genuine interpersonal relationship. It means feeling one with the other in his sufferings and sorrows. It is a partaking in the suffering of our neighbour. It also means standing together in convictions and attaining the common goal. This feeling of solidarity was experienced at the highest level among the early Christians. This feeling of solidarity needs to be renewed and strengthened. Such process is achieved in the celebration of the word of God and the Holy Eucharist.⁷⁰ The members of the community are nourished, strengthened and renewed through the celebration of the Eucharist. Therefore early Christians always celebrated the Eucharist. Most of the Papal documents and the documents of Episcopal Conferences insist on the celebration of the Eucharist.⁷¹

e) **Completeness**: A community is complete in its concern. It is not specialized in one aspect of life, as the group is. Like the natural community, the community in BEC is also complete. The BECs are concerned with the socio-economic, political and cultural aspects of life.⁷² “The community is a global response to the totality of life, integrating all the fundamental social dimensions of the human being.”⁷³ As Pope John Paul II puts it:

The love that is lived by the (Basic Ecclesial), community will take very diverse forms: in the first place to help anyone to deepen one's own faith; then it can be manifested in acts of human promotion of oppressed persons and groups or acts of integration of the marginalized: defense of human rights that are trampled upon, search for justice in situations of injustice, help in overcoming subhuman conditions, and fostering solidarity in a specific society etc.⁷⁴

From the words of Pope John Paul II, we conclude that BEC is global and integral in its vision. It is not specialized only in matters of faith, but also in social concern.

III. The Theological Importance of Being “Basic”

1) **First** of all, the word “Basic” gives the meaning that it is from the *root*, that it is from the very *heart of the community* and that it is from the very *foundation of the community*. If we take the model of the Church as

an Institution, the Pope and the Bishops are on the top, the priests are in the middle and the lay people are at the bottom of the Church; whereas in the Church as Basic Ecclesial Community, it is seen that the Church is built from the bottom. In other words the Church is growing from below.⁷⁵ Just like the tree which is growing from the root, the Church is growing from below, from the root of the community. Thus the Church is represented as an Organism, which is growing from below.

2) **Second**, the Church is called "Basic," because it is the Church for the *poor*.⁷⁶ This Church is overwhelmingly made up of the people who work with their hands.⁷⁷ L. Boff says that the "Ecclesial community has the characteristic being 'basic' because the vast majority of its participants belong to the 'base' society to the poor classes of people."⁷⁸ In other words, the Church belongs to *the small people* of the society. Thus the BEC is the Church for the poor, the small people of the Gospel.

After all, the Church at its origins was a community of the poor. The Gospel was preached to the poor. Jesus came to bring the Good News to the poor, to proclaim liberty to the captives and to set the downtrodden free (Lk 4, 18). It was to the poor and simple people God revealed the mysteries of the kingdom (Mt 11, 25). The Apostles and the Disciples of Jesus were mostly poor fishermen who belonged to the oppressed classes.⁷⁹

3) **Third**, we call this community Basic, because they are *spontaneous* communities.⁸⁰ These communities were not started, but they spontaneously emerged. They were not initiated or established by the hierarchy, but rather they evolved into a Church by the initiative of the ordinary people. When we say it is a spontaneous community, we mean to say that these communities arise due to a compelling reality that prevails in the society.⁸¹ For example when there is a scarcity of ordained ministers in the local Church the lay people organized themselves to celebrate daily prayer and worship. And this is the most important reasons for the emergence of the BEC in Brazil.⁸² *Since they are spontaneous they have a minimum of structure and a maximum of Christian life.*

4) **Fourth**, this community is called “Basic,” because the poor people *feel at home* and they are able to contribute to the growth of the Church. It is a self participatory Church.⁸³ “The BCCs are a humble experience because they represent the reality of the poor and marginalized. They have not emerged out of great theoretical speeches but rather from the faith and love of a poor and simple people.”⁸⁴ In BECs the poor are able to express their religiosity and that is valued. Moreover they are given a concrete opportunity to share in the task of the Church and to work with commitment for the transformation of the world.⁸⁵ “A small minority of clergy... produced everything in the Church—doctrines, theology, worship etc. The vast majority of the members of the Church turned to be mere spectators and recipients without having any active role in the Church.”⁸⁶ Now, the people are aware that they are the Church and that Church belongs to everyone.⁸⁷ These communities still feel the need for an ordained ministry but no longer see a need for clergy/laity distinction.⁸⁸ Every Christian is a minister of Christ and of the Church by his call and charism. The entire community has a priestly, prophetic and kingly ministry.⁸⁹ Though the ordained ministers have specific services, they are not above or outside the community. Everybody feels that he/she is a minister. Everybody is able to participate in the life of the Church. The poor and the needy have a “say” in the Church. Hence these communities are aptly called “Basic Communities.”

5) **Fifth**, it is a self evangelizing Church. Hence it is aptly called a Basic Community. It is no more the priests alone the evangelizers, but also the ordinary people evangelize themselves. They are no more the objects of evangelization. They teach themselves the catechism, provide a fundamental education in faith,⁹⁰ give the Bible instruction⁹¹ and so on. Since the ordinary people i.e. the base level people also have become evangelizers, this Church is defined in terms of **Basic Ecclesial communities**.

6) **Sixth**, they are called “Basic Communities,” because of their size. The parish is usually too big to be a real community of believers and has been reduced to a bureaucratic instrument, which offers services in an

impersonal manner.⁹² Intimate relationship and personal contact are vividly experienced in Basic Communities, because they are small in size. They are normally smaller than a parish and bigger than a family,⁹³ consisting of 15 to 20 families⁹⁴ and 20 to 150 persons.⁹⁵

7) **Seventh**, this is very important; it is called "Basic," because of its ecclesial nature. "It is a Basic Community, not in the sense that it is the base of the Ecclesial Pyramid. Basic means the fundamental Ecclesial element, the Basic Ecclesial reality, where the salvific event or the Paschal Mystery of Christ takes place in a concrete and visible form. It is there the reality of the Church is given visible expression to be the leaven, salt, light and conscience of the World."⁹⁶ Therefore the BEC is called the leaven of Christian life,⁹⁷ the first and fundamental Ecclesial Nucleus,⁹⁸ the initial cell of the Ecclesial Structures,⁹⁹ the germ or the seed of the Church¹⁰⁰ and so on. Thus the BEC is a "church" in itself, as it has the Ecclesial elements of the Church in a concrete and visible manner. "It is not a part of the whole. It is the whole Church in a concentrated form."¹⁰¹

Conclusion

Correct name renders correct understanding of an entity. Correct understanding and awareness will lead the participants to take right orientation and apt action to achieve the goal. Whereas incorrect name causes confusion, diverts the people of God to wrong direction, dilutes the original meaning of an entity and misleads the partakers from the very purpose of its origin. The expression **Small Christian Community** is certainly misleading. As a result of it pious associations, movements are considered as BECs. Even some authors write Bible study groups, RENEW groups, liturgy groups, prayer groups and so on are like BECs, as they are Christians and small in number. Where do we find the geographical proximity i.e. living together in a neighbourhood territory among the members of these groups? They are not living together in a street or a neighbourhood territory; rather they are from different areas coming together in a room or a particular place for discussions.

Similarly the expression **Basic Christian Community** is also very much causing confusion. Many sects bear Christian names and we know that they are focusing on a particular aspect of Jesus Christ and lacking the integral message of our Lord. Some Communities are isolated ones lacking Link-up with the hierarchy. Yet they claim themselves to be Christians. **Basic Ecclesial Community** is the correct name though it is not a perfect one, yet this expression is very close to the life and nature of these Communities.

Endnotes

1. "The BEC... cannot be explained in human terms." J. MARINS and Team, *Basic Ecclesial Community: Church from the Roots*, Bangalore, 1981, p. 6.
2. Cf. A. LIEGE as cited by A. V. RESULTAY, *Basic Christian Communities and their contribution to the life and mission of the Church*, Pontificia Universitas Urbaniana, Rome, 1979, p. 53.
3. Cf. B. SCHREINER, *Le comunità di base*, in *Lettere alle comunità di base*, tr. by B. BESERT, Rome 1974, p. 95.
4. Max DELESPESE, *The Church Community: Leaven and Life-Style*, tr. by K. RUSSELL, Indiana 1973, p. 36.
5. Yves CONGAR, *I gruppi informali nella Chiesa*, in *Comunità ecclesiali di base: utopia o realtà?*, A. GREGORY, ed., tr. by M. P. ANGELONI, Assisi 1977, p. 125.
6. "The Living Ecclesial Communities" or "The Ecclesial Life Communities" (*communautés ecclésiales vivantes*) and "The Small Christian Communities" (*le Piccole Comunità Cristiane*), which are pre-dominantly used in the Synod of Africa by some Bishops of Africa, cf. *I Lavori dell'Assemblea Speciale per l'Africa del Sinodo dei Vescovi*, Prima parte, in *Supplemento a L'Osservatore Romano*, numero odierno (10-19 Aprile 1994) pp. 45, 57, 60, 65, 67, 75. The expression "Small Christian Community" (SCC) is the term most commonly found in Africa, specially by Association of Member Episcopal Conferences of Eastern Africa, (herein after AMECEA) cf. AMECEA, *Building Small Christian Communities*, in *African Ecclesial Review*, 21 (1979) pp. 27-30.
7. For the etymological Meaning of the Word Church Cf. THAMASQUE John Damascene, *The Emerging Basic Ecclesial Communities as Inter Faith Dialogue Communities in the Diocese of Kottar* (Unpublished Thesis), Pontificia Universitas Urbaniana, Roma, 1996, pp. 1-6.

8. The People of Israel underwent hardships, injustice, suppression, depression and many other forms of inhuman sufferings under the Egyptians. God called them through the Prophet Moses and made them a "people" or a "community" with self identity and dignity.
9. In the context of communion between the BEC and the Bishop (Hierarchy) D. S. Amalorpavadass uses the phrase "Unity of Faith," cf. D. S. AMALORPAVA DASS, Foreword, in J. MARINS and Team, op. cit., p. iv.
10. In the context of Ecclesial Nature of the Universal Church, Particular Church and BEC, L. Boff speaks of "Faith and Communion in Faith"; cf. L. BOFF, Ecclesiogenesis: The Base Communities Reinvent the Church, tr. by ROBERT R. BARR, New York, 1986, pp. 10-22.
11. On the formation of BEC as an ecclesial group M. deC. Azevedo speaks of "Faith and Oneness of Faith"; cf. M. deC. AZEVEDO, Basic Ecclesial Communities in Brazil. The Challenge of a New Way of Being the Church, tr. By DRURY J., Georgetown University Press, Washington DC, 1987, p. 66.
12. We hesitate much to accept the reasons given by J. P. Pinto to prefer the word "Christian" to "Ecclesial". He says as follows: "we however, prefer to use the word "Christian" to "Ecclesial" because Jesus Christ is the centre of all the Basic Communities we speak of, and if any communion or ecclesial bond arises, it is because of faith in Jesus Christ. Faith in Him and in His teachings brings the people together and His Spirit unites them in communities". J. P. PINTO, Inculturation through Basic Communities, Bangalore 1985, p. 153. What he insists is only on mere faith in Jesus. It is not mere faith, but a communion of faith of the faithfuls in Jesus brings them together. However he balances his statement by adding the following argument "We however do not intend to minimize the communion which exists or ought to exist between BCCs and the Universal Church... arises from the Common Faith". ID., Ibid. It is interesting to note, he himself uses the word common faith, when he speaks of the bond between BCCs and the Universal Church. We also hesitate much to accept another of his argument to prefer the word "Christian" to "Ecclesial." He says "Ecclesial or Church is subject to misunderstanding as an institution is closely associated with the Western culture and Western garb. Christ and the Christian message are above all the cultures and bound to none". Cf. ID., Ibid., Footnote 39. Even Christ or Christianity is subject to misunderstanding as Western by Hindus and Muslims in India.

13. Cf. *The Church as Messianic People of God is a Community*, THAMASQUE John Damascene, op. cit., pp. 60-62.
14. Cf. L. BOFF, op. cit., pp. 10-22.
15. ID., Ibid.
16. G. MANGAT, art. "The Structures of the Early Church," in *Jeevadhara* (herein after *Jdha*), 28 (1975) 245.
17. "The Integral Message" means the total aspect of Christ's message; which includes Social and Religious aspects. It is not even theologically sound to compartmentalize Christ's message as religious and as social. Christ came to redeem everyone and all aspects of human life; and so we say Christ's message is integral. In other words, Christ's message is one and total. To put it in the words of Vatican II, it is "Fullness of Christian Life" (cf. *Lumen Gentium* 40), and "Integral Salvation" (cf. *Ad gentes* 1) as cited by J. MARINS and Team, op. cit., p. 19. It also means "the total liberation of the human being, in both bodily and spiritual aspects," cf. A. BARREIRO, *Basic Ecclesial Communities, The Evangelisation of the Poor*, tr. by CAMPBELL B., Maryknoll, New York, 1982, p.27. It can also mean "activating of integral humanism," cf. FR. A. GREGORY is cited by L. BOFF, op. cit., p. 12. However at times one aspect has to be given more importance. For example, in the developing countries, the social aspect of human life has to be emphasized more; since they are in need of social justice and equality. But, if they insist only on social life and ignore the religious values; (ultimate meaning of life), as Pope John Paul II says it would mean "Secularism or Proselytism of a Fundamentalist Sect," JOHN PAUL II, Well-formed Christians can meet the challenge of fundamentalist sects, in *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly Edition in English 7 (14 February 1995) 3. Similarly in the search for absolute truth and the inner meaning of life, there are arising "Gnostic sects or pseudo-religious movements which combine biblical and Christian elements... with magic and psychological techniques." Cf. ID., p. 10. These kinds of movements are encouraged in the western societies, which are interested only in personal satisfaction and lacking social justice and social concern. For us these movements are Spiritual Fundamentalist Sects. Therefore, insisting on one aspect of Christ's message and ignoring the other aspect is Sectarianism and it will lead one to fall away from the integral message of Jesus Christ.
18. A. F. DECK, Foreword to the English Translation, in A. BARREIRO, op. cit., p. xi.

19. Cf. M. deC. AZEVEDO, op. cit., p. 68.
20. Cf. ID., p. 69.
21. Cf. Ibid.
22. Cf. D. BARBE, *Grace and Power. Base Communities and Non violence in Brazil*, New York 1987, p. 89.
23. "The word sect comes from the Latin "sequor" which means to follow, specially to follow the doctrines and teachings of some religious, political or philosophical group." W. J. WHALEN, art. American Sects and Cult, in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, (herein after NCE) 13 (1967) 31. However in a practical sense a "sect is a voluntary religious association, exclusive in character, appealing to the individualistic element in Christianity and emphasizing ethical demands." R. K. M. MASTER, art. Sect, in NCE 13 (1967) 30. "Unlike the Church, the sect considers itself a fellowship of the saved rather than a mixture of saints and sinners; sinners are excommunicated and even shunned... The sect usually enforces a rigorous moral code, which in the U. S. has been called Puritanism." W. J. WHALEN, art. cit., pp. 31-32.
24. Cf. *Redemptoris Missio*, (herein after RM), Encyclical Letter of Pope John Paul II, 50.
25. Jim Jones who committed suicide in 1978 with more than 900 of his followers at the people's Temple in Guyana. Like Jim Jones David Koresh the self styled messiah, fashioned a tight-knit community that saw itself at desperate odds with the world outside. He plucked sexual partners as he pleased from among his followers and formed an elite guard of lieutenants to enforce his will. And like Jones, he led his followers to their doom. At lengthy sessions of biblical preaching that cult members attended twice a day, Koresh underlined his authority by impressing upon them that he alone understood the Scriptures. Koresh's theology centered more obsessively upon coming Apocalypse, seven seals in the Book of Revelation. For him and 85 of his followers the world did end in blood and fire in 1993 at Waco in USA. Cf. art. *Tragedy in Waco*, in *Time International* (May 3, 1993) 20-37.
26. "Certainly it is fundamental that communion between the communities of a diocese and the "particular Churches", the dioceses of the whole world, should be maintained; that is the essential task of the Bishop and Pope. Furthermore it cannot be denied that base communities; if entrusted exclusively to the forces that spring from the base run different risks; the temptation to reduce

their ecclesial reality to a simple political dimension, or the danger of becoming sectarian, a "Chapel" closed to the Universal Church". D. BARBE, *op. cit.*, p. 112. "If the SCC (BEC) is not vitally connected with the rest of the Church..., it is no longer really the Church. We would call it an unsociable community". E. LAPOINTE, *An Experience of Pastoral Theology in Southern Africa*, Pontificia Universitas Urbaniana, Rome 1986, p. 175. "If they (BECs) are sectarian and closed in on themselves, critical and disruptive of the unity of the Church, then such communities are merely "sociological basic communities". W. C. GUBUAN, *The Basic Christian Communities in the Church in the Philippines. A Historico-Theological Reflection on the Ecclesial Identity of Basic Christian Communities*, Pontificia Universitatem S.Thomae, Rome, 1992, p. 125. "Small Christian community is not the only ecclesial reality. It must learn to get along with others. It must be a communion of communions. Otherwise it would become sectarian." E. LAPOINTE, *op. cit.*, p. 171.

27. Cf. L. BOFF, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

28. The communion among the Churches is expressed in many ways. Feeling one with the suffering Church is a communion; that is the sense of solidarity, as expressed by Bishop B.D. Sekey "When a Church in one part of Africa suffers, the rest of the Church in Africa suffers, the whole universal Church suffers" ("Quando la Chiesa in una parte dell'Africa soffre, il resto della Chiesa in Africa soffre, la Chiesa universale soffre"). B. D. SEKEY, in *I lavori dell'Assemblea speciale per l'Africa del Sinodo dei Vescovi*, *op.cit.*, p. 56. Communion is also expressed through material collection. Above all the communion can be expressed through standing for kingdom values such as Justice, equality, dignity etc. Besides these elements, in BEC, the communion is expressed through two more ways namely celebration of sacraments and link-up with hierarchy. "Especially at this level we find the essential difference between BCC and BEC. BCC is lacking two elements namely the celebration of the Eucharist (especially) and the coordination with the Pastors." Cf. J. MARINS and Team, *op.cit.*, pp. 77-78.

29. Cf. L. BOFF, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

30. Cf. JOHN PAUL II, *Priest is Shepherded to the Community*, in *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly Edition in English 21 (26 May, 1993) 11.

31. Cf. Bishop's Conference of Brazil (herein after BCB), (Nov. 23-26, 1982) 34.

32. To know the BCC in Italy cf. M. VIGLI, *Il movimento delle comunità di base in Italia*, in *Concilium* 4 (1975) 27-34. For the BCC in France cf. D. H. LEGER,

Osservazioni sulle comunita di base in Francia, in *Concilium* 4 (1975) 55-63. On BCC in USA cf. R. WESTLEY, *Comunità di base negli Stati Uniti*, in *Concilium* 4 (1975) 35-42.

33. Cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (herein after EN), *Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Paul VI*, 58.
34. Cf. *Medallin Conclusions* (herein after MC), *Consejo Episcopal Latino Americano II-1968* (herein after CELAM) 15; 10.
35. M. deC. AZEVEDO, *op. cit.*, p. 69.
36. *ID.*, p. 57.
37. Cf. W. C. GUBUAN, *op. cit.*, pp. 94-95 and 161-162.
38. A. V. RESULTAY, *op. cit.*, p. 52. However he also comments that "while we personally prefer "Basic Ecclesial Community," it is not much used in the English language. Hence, we will use the more popular "Basic Christian Community". *ID.*, *Ibid.* This argument is not acceptable to us, for we cannot sacrifice genuine ecclesial experience and inestimable theology for the sake of popularity.
39. Cf. M. deC. AZEVEDO, *op. cit.*, p. 74.
40. Cf. HILLARY, *Villages, cities and Total Institutions*, *American Sociological Review* (herein after ASR), 8 (1964), as cited by J. SCHERER, *art. "NCE cit.*, p. 104, Footnote 16.
41. Cf. J. L. THOMAS, *art. Family*, in *NCE* 5 (1967) 825.
42. Cf. *ID.*, pp. 825, 826.
43. *Art. Family*, in *The New Encyclopedia Britannica Micropedia*, 4 (1986) 673.
44. Cf. RESULTAY, *op. cit.*, pp. 60-61.
45. J. MARINS and Team, *op. cit.*, p. 20.
46. *ID.*, *Ibid.*
47. Cf. *ID.*, *Ibid.*
48. Cf. *ID.*, *Ibid.*
49. Homogenous means that the persons of the group are of the same kind and level: "Persons of the same age, sex, specialization etc. tending towards uniformity, first of ideas, afterwards, in language and finally, of symbol and even in dress." *ID.*, *Ibid.*
50. Cf. *ID.*, *Ibid.*

51. Cf. ID., Ibid.
52. ID., p. 21.
53. F. TONNIES is cited by C. van GESTEL, art. Association, in NCE 1 (1967) 965.
54. F. TONNIES is cited in Ibid.
55. In the (Basic Ecclesial) Community “the same persons may take responsibility both for tasks called “religious” and for tasks designated as human or political betterment; the same one who gives the Bible instruction or who preaches at the Mass may also be the chief union activist,” D. BARBE, op.cit., p. 89.
56. In the community there is a sense of solidarity, acceptance, interpersonal relationship, oneness, dialogue etc. Each member is important in the community.
57. A. V. Resultay calls the intrinsic elements as the characteristics of a community. Cf. A. V. RESULTAY, op.cit., p. 61. He deals on the characteristics of a community very beautifully and then he goes on to comparing them with BCC, cf. ID., pp. 59-81.
58. Cf. ID., p. 61.
59. Cf. ID., p. 62.
60. To the Kingdom through Small Communities in Word and Worship, Vision Statement, Commission for the Ministry of Word and Worship, Conference of the Catholic Bishops of India , 1999,1.1.
61. Cf. FABC-ITC, Being Church in Asia: Journeying with the Spirit into Fuller Life, in *Weltkirche* 3 (1994) 76.
62. Cf. MC 15, 10.
63. Family movement, charismatic movement, Social Action movement societies, confraternities, Bible discussion group, the Legion of Mary, the St. Vincent de Paul Society, the Knights of Columbus etc. have close personal relationships, but there is no community of life among the members. Religious communities like Jesuits, Dominicans etc. call themselves as communities. However they differ from BEC, because they are open only to those who wish to embrace the religious life; and they live in households, rather than in different houses in neighbourhood. For detailed explanation on this point cf. A. V. RESULTAY, op. cit., pp. 82-84.
64. To the Kingdom through Small Communities in Word and Worship, op.cit,1.2.d.
65. Cf. VATICAN COUNCIL II, *Gaudium et Spes* , 26.