CARDINAL KASPER'S ADDRESS

As one who has been a Catholic member of the Commission on Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches, and has long admired the Commission's theological achievements, it is a great joy for me to greet this gathering, at this celebration of the seventy fifth anniversary of the First World Conference on Faith and Order. It was at that conference in 1927 that the Faith and Order movement was decisively established, a movement which has proven to be of primary importance for the whole ecumenical movement.

But we celebrate now, as well, the sixty fifth anniversary of the Second World Conference at Edinburgh in 1937, and also the "golden anniversary" of the Third World Conference on Faith and Order held fifty years ago at Lund. The legacy of these conferences, too, gives us reason to rejoice.

The reports of those and other world conferences, plenaries, and consultations in the Faith and Order stream have provided rich resources for ecumenical reflection which continue to be valuable today in serving the reconciliation of Christians. When we look back at those conferences, we see how they began to reflect even then on some of the fundamental problems which have divided Christians over the centuries. They set a course of direction upon which subsequent generations could build.

I would especially like to reflect briefly, on just two aspects from Faith and Order literature which are important for the ecumenical movement today. One concerns the theological and spiritual basis of the ecumenical movement. The other concerns the achievements of faith and order dialogue as an instrument for the reconciliation of separated Christian communions.

The Spiritual and Theological Basis of Ecumenism

If there is a crisis in ecumenism today, it may well be that one of the reasons for the crisis is that too often we do not reflect enough, or even forget, the theological and spiritual meaning of the ecumenical movement, the fact that this Movement is, first of all, a service to the gospel and through the salvific meaning of the gospel, a service to the human person and to society.

What distinguishes the ecumenical movement from any other human effort of reconciliation, is that the absolute criterion and motivation for ecumenism is the Gospel. In the ecumenical movement we are called to break down barriers between Christians not for motives, for example, of political expediency, but in obedience to the will of God. Seventy five years ago, the report of the Lausanne conference illustrated this Gospel spirit with these words:

God wills unity. Our presence in this Conference bears testimony to our desire to bend our wills to His. However we may justify the beginnings of disunion, we lament its continuance and henceforth must labour, in penitence and faith, to build up our broken walls.¹

Sixty Five Years ago, in 1937, the Second World Conference on Faith and Order at Edinburgh continued, in the same spirit of the Gospel, saying:

We humbly acknowledge that our divisions are contrary to the will of Christ, and we pray God in His mercy to shorten the days of our separation and to guide us by his Spirit into fullness of unity.²

These perspectives and aspirations expressed by Lausanne and Edinburgh, reflected later in the Vatican conciliar text Unitatis Redintegratio,³ continue to give a Gospel motivation and inspiration to us today: "God wills unity; we must continue to "labour in penitence and faith" to seek that unity. What we need is a renewed ecumenical spirituality, a spirituality of a common listening to the Word of God, of common prayer and common conversion. Such an ecumenical spirituality is the heart of ecumenism.

An Instrument for the Reconciliation Among Churches: Overcoming Historic Divisions

Secondly, for the Catholic Church, "the restoration of unity among all Christians" (UR, 1) is a primary concern. Therefore another important reason for celebrating Lausanne 1927, and the heritage it generated, is the fact that the results of Faith and Order dialogue have clearly been instrumental in the reconciliation of separated churches; it has helped them to overcome historic divisions and, in some cases, to take dramatic steps toward church unity.

One important example has been in building bridges between episcopal and non-episcopal churches. Even in 1927, the Lausanne report gave an important push to reconciling such churches. "In view", it said, "of...the place which the episcopate, the councils of presbyters and the congregation of the faithful, respectively, had in the constitution of the early Church", and the fact that these systems are "today, and have been for centuries, accepted by great communions in Christendom, and...are each believed by many to be essential to the good order of the Church,

² Edinburgh, Second World Conference on Faith and Order August 3-18, 1937, Final Report ("Affirmation of Union in Allegiance to Our Lord Jesus Christ" #191), V, is 1937, p. 73.
³ Unitatis Redintegratio (1964) states that discord among Christians "openly contradicts the will of Christ ... and inflicts damage on the most holy cause of proclaiming the good news to every creature" (#1).
we therefore recognize that these several elements
must all, under conditions which require further
study, have an appropriate place in the order of life
of a reunited Church, and that each separate
communion, ... should gladly bring to the common
life of the united Church its own spiritual

It has been noted that this paragraph from Lausanne
"paved the way for such church unions as that of the
Church of South India"\(^4\) (1947) the creation of which
"has been regarded as a seminal ecumenical event
because it brought together, in a single structure,
churches with episcopal, presbyterial and congregational
polities".\(^5\)

But much closer to our time, the publication, twenty
years ago, of the Faith and Order convergence text
Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (BEM), 1982, made a
significant impact on the whole ecumenical world, which
is well known. It was well received also in the Catholic
Church. And, if a previous pope, early in the twentieth
century, had said no to overtures asking for official
participation of the Catholic Church at the Lausanne
Conference which was then being planned,\(^7\) the present
Pope, John Paul II, has referred often, and favorably to
Faith and Order texts, especially BEM, even specifying
in his 1995 encyclical, Ut unum sint, an important
contribution of BEM to the whole ecumenical

But of particular significance is the fact that BEM has
shown that dialogue can be ecumenically effective. BEM
has been received in the primary sense of helping to
facilitate reconciliation and new relationships between
some separated churches. This is what dialogue is for. I
can give here just a few examples from three different
continents to illustrate. In Europe, the Porvoo
Agreement (1996) brings together British and Irish
Anglican churches with Nordic and Baltic Lutheran
churches into a much closer communion. Common
perspectives on episcopacy are a key to the agreement.
The ministry section of BEM was one of the important
resources for the chapter on episcopacy of the Porvoo
common statement (so too was the Niagara Report (1987)
which was itself influenced by BEM).\(^9\)

In Australia, "the

Towards the Future

Faith and Order has achieved a great deal. But much
more needs to be done.

The ecumenical movement has been, and will always
be, characterized by diversity, because much has to be
done to reach the goal of unity which is shaped
according to the unity within diversity of the triune God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The unity toward which we
are reaching is communion in the image of the Trinity,
communion as sanctification in the same apostolic faith.
To reach this goal ecumenical cooperation of many types
is necessary, for example, in social and cultural life, in the
fields of development, human need and stewardship of
creation, in the various fields of education, and in many
other areas\(^14\) - all are important in our ecumenical

\(^4\) Lausanne, 1927 (v. "The Ministry of the Church. Report of
Section V") #39, V iser pp. 35-36.


\(^6\) Ibid., p. 86.

\(^7\) Pope Benedict XV in 1919. See Tissington Tatlow, "The
World Conference on Faith and Order", in A History of the
Eccumenical Movement 1517-1948, Edited by Ruth Rouse and
pp. 415-416.

\(^8\) Cf. "The fundamental role of Baptism in building up
the Church has clearly brought out thanks also to multilateral
dialogues", Ut unum sint, #42 and note 71.

\(^9\) Together in Mission and Ministry. The Church of Christ
Uniting. Called "The COCU Consensus".

\(^10\) Ibid., p. 11, cf. 149-151.

\(^11\) E.g., that "the fundamental role of Baptism in building up
the Church has clearly brought out thanks also to multilateral
dialogues", Ut unum sint, #42 and note 71.


\(^13\) Cf. Directory For the Application of Principles and Norms on
efforts. The challenge of the Third World Conference on Faith and Order at Lund (1952), to the churches, asking whether they should not “act together in all matters except those in which deep differences of conviction compel them to act separately”\textsuperscript{15} is still timely and prophetic.

But all these activities must be rooted in and guided by the Gospel. For this reason the steps we take in dialogue aimed at clearing up any divergencies there may be in our understanding of the Gospel, or resolving divergencies in matters of the apostolic faith, are critical for every other ecumenical endeavor. It is the apostolic faith which is at the heart of the Church; faith in Jesus Christ, our common Lord, to which the Church gives witness, is that which differentiates Christianity from all other religions, from ideologies of every type, from all other currents of thought and life. It is the apostolic faith, which sets the norms for life in Christ. And, therefore, resolving our differences in matters of faith must be at the core of ecumenical activity, and have priority therein.

It is for this reason that we see Faith and Order as at the very heart of the World Council of Churches. The best celebration of Lausanne, today, would thus be a recommitment to the heritage of multilateral dialogue that it launched. I therefore want to encourage the Commission on Faith and Order in its continuing work. I see two major projects for the near future. First, the project on the “Nature and Purpose of the Church”. Second, the study of anthropology, in the context of the Apostolic tradition as witnessed to in the Bible, a topic which is fundamental for the new ethical questions which challenge us today. Both themes are of great significance for the future of the ecumenical movement.

May God continue to bless Faith and Order’s ongoing efforts to foster reconciliation among the separated followers of Christ so that “they may all be one … so that the world may believe” (Jn 17:21).