

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,

¹ Lausanne. First World Conference on Faith and order August 3-21, 1927, Final Report (I. "The Call To Unity") #5, in *A Documentary History of the Faith and Order Movement 1927-1963*, Edited by Lukas Vischer, St. Louis, Missouri: The Bethany Press, 1963, p. 28. (hereafter = Vischer)

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), *Vischer*, 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 treasures".⁴

It has been noted that this paragraph from Lausanne "paved the way for such church unions as that of the Church of South India"⁵ (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".⁶

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 movement.⁸

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

frequent references to *BEM* in the documents from many of the Australian dialogues is an indication of the extent to which its challenges and implications are being addressed".¹⁰ To mention one of those dialogues, "The mutual acceptance of *BEM* by the Uniting and Anglican Churches has provided the basis for agreement on the doctrine of the Eucharist".¹¹ In North America, the Consultation on Church Union which began in 1960, and includes nine mainline (Protestant and Anglican) churches in the USA, reached a new stage this year, affirming a covenant in January 2002, and becoming "Churches Uniting in Christ". Its theological basis,¹² worked out over a period of forty years, is strongly influenced by *BEM*. In this process, the difficult problem of reconciling episcopal and non-episcopal ministries still remains to be resolved before further steps toward unity can be taken. The basis of theological reflection in attempting to resolve the question is especially the seventh chapter of the theological consensus, on "Ministry". There "The Threefold Pattern of Ordained Ministry" is described in six paragraphs, five of which (39-43) the text acknowledges, "are adapted from *BEM*".¹³

Even these few examples allow us to say that the Lausanne conference, 75 years ago, gave birth to one of the most effective processes of dialogue in the ecumenical movement. There is no reason, then, for, disappointment and disillusion; but, rather, there are reasons to go on with realistic confidence, courage and hope that the Spirit of God who initiated the ecumenical movement will guide it to its goal.

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 areas¹⁴ - all are important in our ecumenical

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

⁵ *The Ecumenical Movement. An Anthology of Key Texts and Voices*, Edited by Michael Kinnamon and Brian E. Cope. Geneva: WCC Publications and Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997, p. 132.

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 Ecumenical Movement 1517-1948*, Edited by Ruth Rouse and Stephen Charles Neill. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1967, pp. 415-416.

⁸ E.g., that "the fundamental role of Baptism in building up the Church has been clearly brought out thanks also to multilateral dialogues", *Ut unum sint*, #42 and note 71.

⁹ *Together in Mission and Ministry. The Porvoo Common Statement with Essays on Church and Ministry in Northern Europe*. London: Church Publishing House, Third Impression 1996. Chapter V

"Episcopacy in the Service of the Apostolicity of the Church", pp. 22-29.

¹⁰ *Stages On The Way. Documents from the Bilateral Conversations between Churches in Australia*, Edited by Raymond K. Williamson. Melbourne: The Joint Board of Christian Education (Australian Council of Churches) 1994, Introduction, p. 9.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 11, cf. 149-151.

¹² Called "The COCU Consensus".

¹³ *Churches in Covenant Communion. The Church of Christ Uniting* Princeton: Consultation on Church Union, 1989. Revised Edition 1995. "The COCU Consensus", pp47-48, citation 48.

¹⁴ Cf. *Directory For the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*, Vatican City 1993, cf. Section V, pp. 78-100.

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"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).

¹⁵ *The Third World Conference on Faith and Order*, held at Lund August 15th-28th, 1952, Edited by Oliver S. Tompkins, London: SCM Press LTD, 1953. The Report 1, p. 16.