

THE FUTURE OF FAITH AND ORDER
FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE NEW GENERATION

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"Above all, love should be rekindled and strengthened among the churches, so that they should no more consider one another as strangers and foreigners, but as relatives, and as being a part of the household of Christ and 'fellow heirs, members of the same body and partakers of the promise of God in Christ'. (Eph. 3:6)".¹

With these words in 1920 the famous encyclical of the Ecumenical Patriarchate contributed² to the formation seven years later, in 1927, in this very city of a permanent structure under the name of "Faith and Order". 75 years later half of the original vision and expectation, namely the strengthening of mutual love among the still divided Churches, has been fulfilled. What remains still an unaccomplished task is the visible unity of the Church, the reformation of the One Body of Christ, the healing of the tragic scandal of the schism of Christianity, which makes the mission and witness of the Church not only ineffective, but to a great extent untrustworthy and unreliable.

Having, of course, said these, I do not by any means disregard or underestimate all the great achievements that our divided Churches through the indispensable help of "Faith and Order" have so far accomplished; the enormous amount of common theological work that has been done on the way toward fuller *koinonia*, which more experienced and renowned churchmen and churchwomen in this panel have already underlined. The Faith and Order movement is now integral to the World Council of Churches. And through the official participation of the Roman Catholic Church and some Pentecostal churches, it is a visible sign of the one ecumenical movement. Programmes like the BEM³ and the more recent one on the Nature and Purpose of the Church,⁴ have radically changed the religious spectrum all over the world. We know that many important steps have been taken. Relationships have greatly improved. Most of our churches are no longer the same as they were 75 years ago. And yet divisions still persist,⁵ reconciliation is still an urgent plea,⁶ the moment when all

¹ Encyclical "Unto the Churches of Christ Everywhere" of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, Constantinople 1920. English translation in the *Ecumenical Review*, Vol. XII, October 1959, No.1, pp. 79-82; also in (Metr. of Sassima) Lennadios Limouris (ed.), *Orthodox Visions of Ecumenism: Statements, Messages, and Reports on the Ecumenical Movement*. WCC Publications, Geneva 1994, pp. 9-11.

² On the Orthodox contribution cf. T. FitzGerald, "Orthodox Theology and Ecumenical Witness: An Introduction to Major Themes," *SVTQ* 42 (1998) 339-361. The unacceptable disunity in the mission field, which resulted in the first major World Mission Conference in Edinburgh, 1910, was another important contributing factor.

³ Faith and Order paper No. 111, WCC Publications, Geneva 1982; also see *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry 1982-1990: Report on the Process and Responses*, Faith and Order paper no. 166, WCC Publications, Geneva 1994.

⁴ Faith and Order paper no. 181, WCC Publications, Geneva 1998.

⁵ One should not ignore the great number of bilateral agreements. More on those in *Growth in Agreement I and II*, WCC Publications, Geneva 1984 and 2000.

who believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour can share a common eucharistic table is still far away.⁷

It is quite common to ask from young people to talk about the future. It is important, however, not to forget that to talk about the future is much harder, a much more difficult task, than to talk about history and the past. I do have this consciousness, and by no means have I any ambition to present to you any novelty, that could have a unique significance. With my limited resources and experience I will add my personal reflection on this festive occasion to the wise views that you have so far heard.⁸

a. My first and immediate hope is to see Faith and Order **broaden its perspective**, to become more inclusive with regard to other - equally important - aspects of our ecclesial identity. Faith and Order must, of course, remain (as it has always been) a theological enterprise,⁹ but with the use of a theology that is more meaningful and relevant to mission, to culture, to the sacramental dimension of human life, of creation, and of the Church. From a post-modern perspective the very title "Faith and Order" gives the impression of an outmoded "modern" enterprise, which limits its area of concerns only to the ideas, the doctrinal beliefs and the structure of an institutional religious organization, not the entire spectrum of an ecclesial "mysterion" (Eph 3,9).¹⁰ If 75 years ago it was inevitable for the restoration of the unity of the Church to tackle the issues of "faith" and "order", today the issues of "experience" and "communion" demand an equal - if not a priority - treatment in the ecumenical movement.¹¹

b. The second expectation of the young generation is, of course, to see this broadened form of Faith and Order intensify its efforts towards the goal of the **visible unity** of the Church. Not simply a unity in all its fundamental aspects (faith, structure, mission, ministry, sacraments, etc.), not only a unity extended to the humankind, but also a unity that embraces the entire creation (ecology). "The call to unity is like the flow of a river; it never ceases", Bishop Brent said in Lausanne in 1927.¹² The 20th century was the ecumenical century. What will the 21st be like? Young people are impatient, enthusiastic, full of hope. But they could also become disappointed. I am sure many among you have often felt that disappointment, too. When one sees the churches losing their enthusiasm and their commitment to the goal of visible unity, when they are unwilling to put the theological agreements into practice, when they are reluctant to take a step and move from convergence to conversion, and sometimes, unfortunately, they even take steps backwards,

⁶ Not accidental that major meetings like the General Assembly of KEK at Graz in 1997, the forthcoming Assembly of LWF and the CWME have chosen "reconciliation" and healing as their focal issue.

⁷ Both those churches that accept intercommunion and those that reject it have as their final goal the one common Eucharist.

⁸ Dr Lukas Vischer, Dr Mary Tanner and Cardinal Walter Kasper.

⁹ Metropolitan John (Zizioulas) of Pergamon at the Faith and Order consultation with Younger Theologians held at Turku, Finland, 3 - 11 August 1995 (The whole text of his paper in <http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/faith/ziziou.html>).

¹⁰ G. Florovsky, "The Elements of Liturgy," in G. Patelos (ed.), *The Orthodox Church in the Ecumenical Movement*, WCC Publications, Geneva 1978, 172-182, p.172.

¹¹ For a development of the problematic, cf. Kuncheria Pathil, *Models in Ecumenical Dialogue: A Study of the Methodological Development in the Commission on "Faith and Order" of the World Council of Churches*, Bangalore 1981.

¹² Lausanne, First World Conference on Faith and Order August 3-21, 1927. Final Report (The Call To Unity), 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.

some sort of frustration is inevitable. But the younger generation does not believe that Christian unity is a lost case, a mission impossible; neither can they tolerate our Churches being satisfied only with a kind of "ecumenism of friendship". We very much regret the almost complete lack of mutual accountability among the still divided but "holy" churches, when the society at large is forced by the "unholy" mechanisms of globalization practically to break down all divisive boundaries.¹³

As young theologians who struggle to proclaim the Gospel to a globalized post-modern world, what is the witness that we give to our fellows, especially when we seem to have reached a dead end with unity? What is the message we can convey to them, when we seem to be satisfied only with common action? I do not underestimate how difficult is to deal with the hard core ecclesiological issues. But "Being a church" is not simply an ecclesiological issue. It deals with the very essence of our Christian faith, and "becoming a Church" has always been at the heart of ecumenism.¹⁴

C My third concern is one of **theological methodology** in dealing with the question of Church unity. I come from a tradition which has placed a lot of emphasis (traditionally but also in recent years) on Pneumatology, on the decisive role of the Holy Spirit, that blows wherever He or She wills (Jn 3,8). So far, only Christology and Christocentrism was the guiding methodological principle of our quest for the unity of the Church. Of course, in recent ecumenical discussions a lot of emphasis has been put on the rediscovery of the forgotten trinitarian dimension of the tradition of the undivided Church. And the impact of the pneumatological criterion on our understanding on being a church, on our search for unity and on our understanding of the people of other faiths, was incredible. This was by no means a disregard of Christology, but a new and more profound understanding of it: a Christology conditioned by Pneumatology, to use the words of His Eminence Metropolitan of Pergamon, John Zizioulas.¹⁵ For the young generation, Pneumatology can become the springboard to embark to new horizons, the basis from which we can move on and open our theology to the challenges of a changing world. How can we make the work of Faith and Order relevant to the changes of the time? How can we relate the ecclesial dimension of unity to globalization, contextualization and even to confessionalism, except through the life-giving Holy Spirit? After all, to meet more directly and meaningfully the challenges of our time, to see theology and the search for unity in the context of our world today, the unity we seek cannot be based only on theological agreements. It should have an impact on human existence, on culture and on the environment, God's created world.

d. Last but not least, comes the notion of **ecumenical spirituality**. From my studies at the University of Thessaloniki, where an ecumenism at the level of spirituality has been launched¹⁶ - something that has recently been so strongly argued by His Eminence Cardinal Walter Kasper¹⁷ - spirituality has gained a prominent place in my heart for dealing with almost all divisive issues of our faith. I would like to see Faith and Order deal with

¹³ For a recent Orthodox approach to globalization in (Archbishop of Albania) Anastasios Yannoulatos, *Globalization and Orthodoxy*, Athens 2000 (in Greek).

¹⁴ Cf. K. Raiser, *To be the Church: Challenges and Hopes for the New Millenium*, WCC Publications, Geneva 1997.

¹⁵ (Metr. of Pergamon) John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion. Studies in Personhood and the Church*, New York, SVS Press 1985, p. 140.

¹⁶ Since 1992 the Faculty of Theology of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki and the Pontifical Institute of Spirituality Ateneum Antonianum organise meetings in an attempt to meet, learn and understand each other, promoting the dialogue between East and West, not so much on a theoretical/theological level, but on the level of spirituality.

¹⁷ Cf. his unpublished paper on "Ecumenism of Spirituality".

spirituality, liturgy, Eucharist etc. in a more integral way. With so much scholarly work done, especially in the biblical field,¹⁸ on the importance of the Eucharist, not as a sacramental act, but as an eschatological reality that was instrumental at the beginning of the Christian movement to its mission, its spirituality, but mainly to its identity, in other words to the unity of the Church,¹⁹ it seems to me imperative for Faith and Order's future work to develop a study on spirituality, in addition to "ecclesiology". So far ecumenical worship was a marginal enterprise - rather of practical significance - for the ecumenical movement within the activities of Faith and Order. It is time to give it a high priority in order that all the churches enhance their knowledge of their common tradition, and hopefully reconsider their different views on Eucharist, the Sacrament par excellence of Christianity.

The future of our little universe depends on a reconciled world, a united Christianity. The future of Christianity depends on a healthy ecumenism. And the future of ecumenism depends to a great extent on the work of a new and renewed Faith and Order. We, the young generation, promise to continue with passion this work. Because God wills unity and we constantly pray to God Your will be done...

¹⁸ Cf. among others B. Chilton, *A Feast of Meanings. Eucharistic Theologies from Jesus through Johannine Circles*, Leiden 1994; and E. Nodet-J. Taylor, *The Origins of Christianity: An Exploration*, Collegeville 1998.

¹⁹ More in P. Vassiliadis, "The Eucharistic Perspective of the Church's Mission," in *Eucharist and Witness. Orthodox Perspectives on the Unity and Mission of the Church*, WCC/HC Orthodox Press, Geneva/Boston 1998, pp. 49-66.