The Oxford Handbook of Ecumenical Studies
In memory of
Geoffrey Wainwright
(1939–2020)
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INTRODUCTION

A remarkable feature of the twentieth century was the widespread effort it saw for Christian unity. ‘In a century which was one of the most dark and bloody . . ., where two world wars cost the lives of millions, where two totalitarian systems and many dictatorships produced countless innocent victims, Christians [stood] up to overcome their centuries-old divisions, giving witness to the fact that despite guilt in the past on all sides reconciliation is possible.’ These words of Cardinal Walter Kasper, then-president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (PCPCU), during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity in 2008, highlight how dramatic this development was in the life not just of the church but also of the world. ‘Really’, he added, ‘in the last century ecumenism was a light shining in the darkness and a powerful peace movement’ (Bulletin of the Centro Pro Unione 73, 16). Indeed, one of the pioneers of ecumenism, John R. Mott, received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1946.

How did this happen? How did the various Christian traditions react and contribute? What were the issues, the gains, and the losses? How do we stand now: is the light still shining or has it waned? What are the prospects for further progress? What might unity look like and is it desirable? Now, early in the twenty-first century, a hundred years on from the beginnings of the modern ecumenical movement—in the Edinburgh Missionary Conference of 1910 and the rallying calls of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople and the Lambeth Conference, respectively, in 1920—seems an excellent time to take stock of the ecumenical century and to think seriously about where we go from here. Such is the purpose and goal of this Oxford Handbook of Ecumenical Studies.

Mindful of Kasper’s words, it is important first to examine how the unprecedented witness that ‘reconciliation is possible’ came about. How did the story unfold? What are the main events and what was their significance? That is the purpose of Part I on ‘History’. After an initial chapter dealing with ecumenism pre-1910, landmark events with a bearing on ecumenism have been used to divide the period from 1910 to the present into four further chapters: 1910 to 1948 (the founding of the World Council of Churches); 1948 to 1965 (the end of the Second Vatican Council); 1965 to 1990 (the fall of communism and the opening up of eastern Europe); and 1990 to the present.

What part have the different Christian traditions played in the story? That is the focus of Part II, which examines the ways in which major Christian traditions (Orthodox, Anglican, Methodist, Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed, Baptist, Pentecostal and Charismatic) have viewed the ecumenical project, responded to it, and contributed to it. Some were involved from the start (e.g. Orthodox, Anglican), others entered
later but with enthusiasm (e.g. Catholic), still others remain somewhat ambivalent (e.g. Pentecostal, Charismatic). Why was/is this? If ecumenical dialogue is an 'exchange of gifts' (Pope John Paul II), what gifts have been offered and received by the various dialogue partners?

Part III moves from a focus on traditions to areas of theology and church life and surveys a broad range of historically controversial topics. What has been achieved in dialogue on various areas of Christian belief and practice—Christology, church, baptism, eucharist, ministry, liturgy, justification, morals, mission and evangelism, and ecology—not only with regard to overcoming past difficulties, but also with regard to building consensus and advancing understanding? It is also important in the respective chapters to indicate which issues remain unresolved, to examine why, and to ponder possible avenues for further progress.

The progress that has been made is due in no small measure to the numerous and varied 'instruments' or organs of dialogue and ecumenical interaction that have been established at different times to serve a variety of different needs. Part IV considers the most significant of these instruments: the Faith and Order Commission, the World Council of Churches, the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, bilateral dialogues, the Groupe des Dombes, Chevetogne and Táizé, the Pro Oriente foundation, united and uniting churches, regional and national councils of churches, covenants, interchurch families, the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, and the Global Christian Forum. The ways in which these instruments have functioned, often benefiting from the inspiration and drive of remarkable individuals, are examined, and ways also in which they have encountered problems. How effective have they been, and what has been learned?

Ecumenism has certain commonalities across the globe, but is also marked by considerable regional differences. Part V seeks to take the pulse of the ecumenical movement in seven major sectors of the world, tracking its progress, analysing its particular characteristics, highlighting the achievements and disappointments. The countries or regions considered are: Britain and Ireland, the USA, Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Middle East, and Europe.

The final Part VI of the Handbook looks to the future and asks urgent questions: where do we stand and what are the prospects with regard to the goal and method of the ecumenical movement? There has long been debate both with regard to what kind of goal is possible and desirable—what might Christian unity look like?—and with regard to the method that should be adopted for dialogue and the recognition of progress—how should we proceed? The treatment of these questions requires both experience and imagination and, of course, there are varying opinions in their regard. Some favour a unity of 'all in each place', while others seek a 'reconciled diversity'. Again, with regard to method, some see and advocate a continued convergence, others a 'reconfessionalization'. In order to sample a variety of positions, and benefit from some vigorous thought, there are three chapters on 'forms of unity' and three on 'methodology'.

Authors from a range of Christian traditions, some of whom are older, with great experience of ecumenical involvement, some younger, taking up the baton to press ahead with the ecumenical challenge, have generously responded to invitations to con-

INTRODUCTION
tribute from the editors, who themselves represent different generations and traditions. The aim throughout has been fine scholarship well communicated, so that the Handbook can provide a comprehensive, reliable, and engaging study of ecumenism.

Geoffrey Wainwright

Paul McPartlan

Postscript

Having first been conceived around the time of the centenary of the Edinburgh Missionary Conference (1910), this volume has finally reached completion at the centenary of the two rallying calls mentioned above: the encyclical letter of the Ecumenical Patriarchate ‘Unto the Churches of Christ everywhere’ in January 1920, and the ‘Appeal to all Christian People’ from the Lambeth Conference in July 1920.

I was delighted when Geoffrey invited me to co-edit this Handbook with him. Though many of the chapters we requested quickly arrived, some unexpected factors interrupted the early editing process, and then, having devoted much energy to the project, unfortunately ill health prevented Geoffrey from working further on it. All of the chapters were subsequently reviewed and updated where necessary by their authors, to whom I am enormously grateful for their remarkable expertise and willing collaboration. Sincere thanks are also due to the highly efficient staff of Oxford University Press, and particularly to Tom Perridge and Karen Raith for their patience and support throughout. Special mention should be made of four of the contributors who died during the decade of production, having already submitted their excellent chapters: Ralph Del Colle, Günther Gassmann, Jeffrey Gros, and Harding Meyer.

Geoffrey died on 17 March 2020. With affection, and with admiration for his outstanding and related contributions to the development of a truly liturgical theology and to ecumenism over many years, this volume is dedicated in his memory. May he and the colleagues just named rest in peace and rise in glory!

Paul McPartlan

Easter 2020
PART I

HISTORY
The Early Stages: Pre-1910

Olaf Tjørhom

Introduction

The 1910 World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh was primarily conceived as a mission event, yet it became the cradle of the modern ecumenical movement. The challenge of unity kept surfacing both at the meeting and during its preparations. Key figures in this process played leading roles in shaping later ecumenical initiatives, and there are distinct lines of continuity from the conference to the formation of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in 1948.

This chapter aims at accounting for the early stages of the ecumenical advance. Its focus will be on the period from around 1850 up to and including the Edinburgh Conference 1910. We are thus located in the era that can be described as the peak of modernity. More specifically, we will deal with some of the factors and currents that paved the way for organized ecumenical work and with the initial responses of the churches to the quest for unity—hampered at that time by confessionalist attitudes as well as by cases of sectarian defensiveness in facing the modern world. Since the ecclesial situation of this period is marked by the climax of European expansionism and rising North American aspirations, our perspective will have to be predominantly Western.

The term ‘modern ecumenical movement’ may require some clarification. This movement has the restoration and manifestation of Christian unity in faith, life, and mission as its fundamental and explicit goal. Towards that end, it serves as a tool of the participating churches and not as a ‘super-church’ of its own standing. It aims to embrace all ecclesial traditions across the globe, and thus is largely multilateral in its approach, while also including bilateral initiatives. It developed during the period of late modernity—
having its breakthrough in the first half of the nineteenth century and having the WCC
as its primary, though not sole, present expression.

Throughout the nineteenth century, the ecumenical venture was marked by trans-
formation and exploration—searching for its form. This phase comprises a rich and fas-
cinating, but also complex, development. Within the space at our disposal here, we can
only present a brief overview. Fuller accounts may be found in works listed in the
References at the end of the chapter.

THE CONTEXT, IN THE WORLD
AND IN THE CHURCH

In trying to list some central trajectories of the ‘long’ nineteenth century—lasting until
the outbreak of the First World War in 1914—the incongruities of the period come to the
fore. On the one hand, the benefits of the Industrial Revolution were extended to larger
segments of the people—if slowly and unevenly. In the wake of the European revolu-
tions of 1848, there was some increase in democratic awareness, nurtured by popular
movements and leading to the adoption of parliamentary democracy in many nations.
Communication was vastly improved by steam-driven trains and ships as well as by the
electric telegraph and the telephone. Towering figures such as Darwin, Kierkegaard,
Marx, Freud, and Einstein introduced innovative, diverse, and challenging ideas, and a
rich plurality of ever-more progressive expressions flourished in the arts and in cultural
life. All this added to a climate of optimism, despite some fin de siècle sentiments at the
turn of the century.

On the other hand, many of the positive trends had harsh implications. While rural
areas experienced recession, urbanization grew at an explosive rate. So did the indus-
trial proletariat, which was exposed to massive exploitation, particularly of women and
children. Austere prospects led to waves of immigration. Furthermore, Western imperi-
alism reached its climax around the end of the century. In 1914, approximately four-fifths
of the surface of the earth was under Western dominion. Imperialism was nurtured by
an unwarranted belief in European supremacy and an ensuing contempt for other cul-
tures, and it was draped in the nationalist surge that accompanied the establishment of
nation states. In striking disparity to the successful campaigns against slavery, there
were regular examples of attempts at demolition directed against indigenous peoples.
Generally, the affluence of a few—be they individuals or nations—stood in harsh con-
trast to the poverty of the deprived.

In the field of religion, ambiguity prevailed. Secularization escalated in Europe,
chiefly in the sense that many of the privileges of the churches in public life were
reduced. Even if quite a number remained as ‘established’ institutions, they increas-
ingly lost their grip on education, culture, and the moral life of the community. Yet
external pressures promoted internal consolidation. The Churches were forced to
develop structures and initiatives of their own. This was inspired by a new sense of
ecclesial identity, with in some cases, admittedly, a tendency to seclusion; and it was
fortified by constructive impulses from a surging number of Free Churches. Moreover,
the ‘great awakenings’ of the era contributed to a bold Christian presence in society.
One might, thus, argue that the process of secularization not only liberated civil society
from undue religious hegemony, but also stimulated increased self-awareness among
faith groups. Even if this was primarily the case in regard to the Christian churches,
similar traits can be identified in Islam—and to some extent in Hinduism and
Buddhism, also.

The clash between religion and modernist culture was a key feature of the nineteenth
century. While some churches partly adapted to modernism, others fought vehemently
against it. Early nineteenth-century German theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher’s
attempt to identify an intermediate position between rationalism and orthodoxy was
embraced by various leaders and academics, but had limited success among the faithful.
The advancement of a historical-critical method and new interpretations of the Holy
Scriptures, based on proposals by Ferdinand Christian Baur (1792–1860), David
Friedrich Strauss (1808–1874), and Julius Wellhausen (1844–1918), led to heated con-
flicts. Throughout the period and beyond, tensions between liberal Protestantism and
conservatives of high-church or revivalist persuasions grew. Some, however, searched
for a modus vivendi in relation to the modern world. Such attitudes became influential
in the founding of the modern ecumenical movement.

In the United States, sharp, ethnically motivated divisions both between the churches
and within the denominations lingered after the Civil War (1861–65). Despite the aboli-
tion of slavery, racial tensions set their mark on American society and its church life for
a long time. Waves of Catholic immigrants, especially Irish, swelled from around 1845.
This led to cases of surging anti-Catholicism. The search for religious freedom by new
citizens was challenged and partly blurred by growing fundamentalism. Some of these
sentiments were exported back to Europe and to the rest of the world as dividing
impulses. Yet, churches in the United States also contributed significantly to the national
‘melting pot’ of cultural unity, and their vitality in facing ever new frontiers became an
ecumenical force, also internationally.

The social, cultural, and global developments of the epoch implied major chal-
lenges for all Christian communities. The desperate need among the poor demanded
a response. The organized working class adopted an increasingly critical attitude to
the established churches. The relationship between European imperialism and mis-
sion ventures urgently required clarification. The cultural wars continued and demo-
graphic shifts called for a relocation of resources. However, church divisions proved a
huge obstacle in finding appropriate solutions to these pressing concerns. Here, too,
the ecumenical movement provided a fresh impulse. This movement has always been
contextually driven and the challenges of the nineteenth century were vital in shaping
its agenda.
Nineteenth-Century Ecumenism:
Some Basic Traits

The Union of Prussia was established in 1817 and included Reformed, Lutheran, and some Huguenot parishes. While this scheme reflected a zeal for unity, it increasingly came to depend on political force. Especially among the Old Lutherans, there was strong opposition to a proposed common liturgy. Many of these groups ended up fleeing to the US, and continued to be marked by confessionalism and ecumenical reluctance. Yet the initiative became a spur for later church unions, not least the Evangelical Church in Germany. Another largely politically based unity proposal was Friedrich Wilhelm IV’s attempt to introduce the historic episcopate in his realm through an Anglican-Prussian bishopric in Jerusalem in 1841. However, despite the Church of England’s initial support, this project failed.

Far more essential, though predominantly indirect, ecumenical impulses came from the international youth movement. It started with the Young Men’s Christian Association in 1844, followed by the Young Women’s Christian Association in 1855. Neither of these bodies had organized or structured church unity as their chief concern. They were largely moulded by the evangelical revival and aimed at bringing together youth with a passion for Christ from all over the world, including the so-called ‘younger churches’ of the south. Still, the YMCA and YWCA proved to have strong ecumenical prospects—partly by focusing on unity in Christ rather than on denominational divisions, and partly by offering a framework in which people from several traditions could experience spiritual and human fellowship. Youth organizations also served as an effective recruitment platform for the Edinburgh Conference and beyond. The YMCA’s ‘Paris Basis’ of 1855 points towards the paragraph giving the ‘basis’ of the WCC.

In the same period, a number of local and national Student Christian Movements were formed. The parallel Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Mission concentrated on global outreach and assigning missionaries. In 1895, the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF) was established. While the YMCA and YWCA were grounded in evangelical currents, the WSCF sought to widen this perspective. Not least due to John R. Mott’s efforts, the student movement aimed at including Orthodox and Roman Catholics—looking beyond the Protestant community—and its ecumenical emphases were more developed and explicit. The WSCF was also essential in recruiting a huge number of ecumenists; from Edinburgh 1910 to Amsterdam 1948 a clear majority of the participants at ecumenical gatherings had a background in this organization. It can thus be argued that one of the most important impulses to the modern ecumenical movement came from the WSCF.

When the Evangelical Alliance first assembled in London in 1846, some 800 faithful from the US and Canada, the UK, and parts of continental Europe were present. They came from fifty-two churches, but had a common background in the evangelical revival. The main purpose of the meeting was to nurture ‘Christian brotherhood’
through fellowship and joint prayer. The event undoubtedly had a strong ecumenical impact. The Alliance was a firm advocate of global mission, religious freedom, and united prayer—including an annual prayer week. Yet, there were limits to its ecumenicity. First, it was a gathering of individuals who shared a unifying spiritual experience and not of representatives of churches. Second, its basis became so detailed that it had narrowing or even exclusive implications. Third, it was marked by a distance from other Christians—chiefly the ‘three P’s’: Popery, Puseyism, and Plymouth Brethrenism. As a result, the Alliance ended up as a manifestation of a then-widespread, but still limited, strand of Christian piety. It did contribute to preparing the ground for the ecumenical movement, but its distinct ties to this movement appear to be more implicit.

The nineteenth century was an age of societies and associations that provided space for broad popular and lay engagement, also within many of the churches. Such bodies functioned as effective instruments in realizing set objectives and as a school in democracy. Starting with the British and Foreign Bible Society in 1804, cross-denominational associations which aimed at distributing the Bible without addressing controversial questions of interpretation had evident ecumenical bearings. This was partly reduced by a decision to remove the deuterocanonical books from the editions. Even more essential were the interdenominational mission enterprises, once more originating in England with the London Missionary Society of 1795. Here ‘nonconformists’ as well as ‘low’ Anglicans were involved. This impulse spread across major parts of Europe and North America. Soon, the missionaries’ experience that church schisms represented a massive impediment to the mission enterprise brought urgency to ecumenism. A budding Christian globalism also created space for influences from the south. Edinburgh 1910 is the ultimate affirmation that mission initiatives contributed substantially to the breakthrough of the modern ecumenical movement.

Varying parts of a Christian social movement played a key role in paving the way for ecumenism, too. This applies, for instance, to the diaconal ventures that were grounded in classic German pietism, with J. H. Wichern (1808–81) as a leading figure. While these ventures often had a fairly conservative political profile, they did impressive charitable work and contributed a notable ecumenical awareness. Especially in the US, but partly also in the UK, segments of the social movement took a different path. They had a vision of the manifestation of God’s kingdom on earth which pointed towards a radical ‘social gospel’. Proponents of this view such as Harry Ward and Walter Rauschenbusch were central to the formation of the US Federal Council of Churches (1908), the forerunner of the National Council of Churches in the USA. At its foundation, the Federal Council adopted a ‘social creed’ that was later accused of conveying ‘Fabian socialism’ and communism. Such accusations have followed the FCC/NCC ever since, and have also been directed against international ecumenical organizations.

Finally, some theologies of the nineteenth century which underscored the requirement of unity and thus challenged the manifestations of dense confessionalism in this period must briefly be listed: the romantically inclined, organic ecclesiology of Johann Adam Möhler (1796–1838) had a favourable reception both within and outside the Roman Catholic Church and also among some Eastern Orthodox. In spite of its distinct
Protestant nature, the irenic and modernizing implications of liberal theology had an ecumenical potential. This was even more the case with impulses from Nicolaus von Zinzendorf (1700–1760) and Herrnhutism. The Oxford Movement was not exactly irenic, yet several Tractarians had a passion for unity with Rome and the Orthodox churches. This was in keeping with their launching of the ‘branch theory’—which argued that the church of Christ had a single trunk, but three main branches: Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, and (high) Anglicanism. However, ‘practical’ factors were even more crucial in preparing the breakthrough of the modern ecumenical movement. In addition to the spread of the Bible, joint mission and the calling to common service in the world, the sharing of hymns, and essential initiatives in praying for Christian unity became increasingly important—even though the annual Week of Prayer for Christian Unity was established at a later stage.

The Attitude of the Churches: Reticence and Openness

Nineteenth-century Roman Catholicism was not without an engagement in the quest for unity, but this engagement was biased and thus largely dividing. The favoured solution to the problem of schism was a ‘return’ to the Roman mother church under the reign of the supreme pontiff. This was clearly the attitude concerning all strands of Protestantism, but also towards the Eastern churches. Moreover, the Catholic Church was not a part of the emerging ecumenical movement. For a long time, it regarded the movement with deep suspicion. Such attitudes can only partly be explained by political pressure, occurrences of anti-Catholic sentiments, and the Protestant composition of the ecumenical endeavours. The principal reasons were an exclusivist ecclesiology which identified Christ’s church with the Roman institution, surging ultramontanism, and a defensive ‘anti-modernism’ which singled out modernity as the core of heresy and resulted in regular clashes with the secular world. The First Vatican Council’s dogma of papal infallibility became a clear obstacle to ecumenical advance. So did Leo XIII’s bull, *Apostolicae Curae* (1896), dismissing Anglican orders as ‘absolutely null and utterly void’. Affirmative contributions in the field of ecumenism were almost solely limited to individual voices, while the Catholic Church did not change its position substantially until the Second Vatican Council (1962–65).

In the early stages of modern ecumenism, some Orthodox Churches were still marked by reservations against Western Christianity. These misgivings were doctrinally grounded, but also included cultural and political factors. Nevertheless, a more open attitude was taking shape. There were several examples of substantial theological exchange, primarily with Anglicans and Old Catholics. In these talks, Russian participants (temporarily) took a different stance from Rome on the question of the validity of Anglican orders. The WSCF conference in Constantinople in 1911 led to increased
Orthodox participation in the Student Christian Movement and here the future Metropolitan Germanos Strenopoulos (1872–1951) played a key role. Additionally, ecumenically based Bible societies were established throughout the Orthodox world. All this points towards the decisive turn that came with the 1920 encyclical of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, ‘Unto the Churches of Christ Everywhere’. This text represents the start of the many vital Orthodox contributions to the ecumenical movement.

The Union of Utrecht is a communion of Old Catholic Churches, formed in 1889 by a group of dissident Roman Catholics in Germany. Ignaz von Döllinger, the leader of the group, was excommunicated because of his firm opposition to papal infallibility. Like Döllinger, Old Catholics displayed a distinctive ecumenical commitment. However, their participation in organized, modern ecumenism has been of a more limited kind.

The Anglican Communion became an increasingly active proponent of unity during the nineteenth century. Its image as a ‘bridge church’ is partly grounded in the fact that it has long incorporated three ecclesial parties: the high—later dominated by Anglo-Catholics, the ‘pragmatic-liberal’ broad, and the Evangelical low. This fostered ecumenical consciousness. Even if the decennial Lambeth Conferences (from 1867) were launched chiefly as an inner bond of unity, they soon assumed crucial ecumenical tasks. In 1888, the Chicago–Lambeth Quadrilateral was adopted as a theological clarification of the basis of church fellowship, emphasising four criteria: Holy Scriptures, the Apostolic and Nicene Creeds, the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper, and the historic episcopate. Right from the start, the Quadrilateral served as a foundation for bilateral negotiations with other churches, while also providing important impulses for the future work of Faith and Order. Yet, its focus on historic succession became a problem for traditions that had lost this mark and for churches that lacked a distinct episcopate. Through instances of adopting a somewhat more ‘flexible’ attitude on this point, the Protestant Episcopal Church in the USA came to play a particularly constructive role in the preparatory and initial stages of modern ecumenism.

Despite the origin of the Lutheran reformation as a renewal movement within the one church, Lutheran contributions at the early stages of the modern ecumenical venture were often cautious and hesitant. This was largely due to a distinct doctrinal identity which occasionally had confessionalist overtones. Among Old Lutherans, harsh experiences from the Prussian Union still lingered. Furthermore, Lutheran revival and neo-pietist groups were less dedicated to building a wide Christian fellowship than the Anglo-American awakenings, and the massive hegemony of the Nordic state churches made the ecumenical challenge less visible in their territories. There were, however, notable exceptions—primarily within the more Protestant strands of Lutheranism. The legacy of Herrnhutism, with its advocacy of open communion, was still operative in some circles. In Austria, a union with the Reformed was established in 1891, within the framework of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburgian and Helvetic Confessions, and the Swedish Augustana Synod in North America established close ties with the Protestant Episcopal Church, which from the 1860s even involved a measure of collaboration in the area of ordained ministries.
Within other Protestant churches, such as the Reformed, Methodist, and Baptist, there was a certain measure of ambiguity with regard to the cause of ecumenism during the nineteenth century. On the one hand, there was the danger of an exposure to internal schisms. This was the case among the Reformed in the Netherlands and South Africa, Presbyterians in Scotland and the USA, and Methodists especially in North America. Moreover, the Free Church tradition was grounded in a (fully understandable, as such) protest against the biased supremacy of the established churches. On the other hand, the Protestant schisms were often contextually conditioned and thus less governed by doctrinal confessionalism. Towards the end of the century, Protestants succeeded in establishing several unions within their own ranks, including Methodist reunions in Canada (1884), Australia (1902), and Ireland (1905). The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)—a North American-based church that is largely congregationalist in its polity—has, ever since its foundation in 1832, demonstrated a notable commitment to unity. Most decisively, all these traditions were strongly involved in the evangelical awakenings and the interdenominational mission enterprises, which contributed substantially in preparing the ground for the modern ecumenical movement. When this movement was organized, Protestants in many cases played essential roles.

In summary, the nineteenth century saw a number of new divisions. Quite a few of these had their background in injustices permeated by state church systems and continued clashes with modernity, and the concrete results in the field of ecumenism during this phase were modest. Yet positive developments can be identified, too. First, several world confessional structures were set up subsequent to the Lambeth Conference of 1867: the Alliance of Reformed Churches (1875); the Ecumenical Methodist Conference (1881); the International Congregational Council (1891); and the Baptist World Conference (1905). Even if these bodies had a denominational scope, they increasingly gave proof of a wider ecumenical relevance. Second, this period also witnessed the frail beginnings of Church unions. Its denominational reunions foreshadow cross-confessional mergers in the first half of the twentieth century. In terms of contemporary unity models, the favoured concepts ranged from a loose association to full organic union. Third, unity became an inevitable topic within all traditions in this era, irrespective of diverging ecumenical practices. All this contributed significantly in preparing the ground for the breakthrough of modern ecumenism.

**John R. Mott, the Chief Architect**

Partly to the loss of the ecumenical movement, the work for church fellowship has increasingly become the task of professionals. In the early stages of modern ecumenism, however, this challenge was primarily taken up by dedicated individuals who defied the neglect of the call to unity, and was marked by massive lay involvement. The corps of voluntary ecumenists was diverse. It included people who yearned deeply for union with Rome and Orthodoxy, such as the somewhat whimsical adherents to the
Association for the Promotion of the Unity of Christendom of 1857. On the other side, there were staunch Evangelical preachers and Protestant pastors devoted to catering for the revivolist legacy. Many of these contributed substantially to the ecumenical cause, but none as much as John R. Mott (1865–1955)—the only other comparable proponents were Joseph Houldsworth Oldham, a long-time associate of Mott, and Nathan Söderblom, the Lutheran Archbishop of Uppsala. Yet Mott was probably the most central figure, at least in the period up to and a little beyond Edinburgh 1910.

John Raleigh Mott was an American layperson of Methodist background. He was largely formed in what his biographer, C. Howard Hopkins, labels the US ‘age of energy’. However, his indefatigable activism was coupled with a profound spiritual longing for Christian unity and he was clearly committed to mission. Mott was central in organizing the American YMCA. He became the main initiator of the Student Volunteer Movement and the WSCF, and he worked incessantly to widen the international and ecumenical scope of these enterprises. In the midst of this process, he was elected to chair the Edinburgh Conference and its preparations. In the latter part of his life, Mott witnessed and was strongly involved in the formation of the World Council of Churches, which made him its honorary president in 1948. For his contributions to reconciliation and achievements in ecumenism, he received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1946. John Mott can, accordingly, be described as the chief architect of the modern ecumenical movement during its earlier stages.

Together with his capacity to inspire, Mott’s foremost contribution to the advance towards church unity was his endeavour to provide a link from a personal yearning for fellowship to a more widely conceived and formally structured ecumenism. Along such lines, the effects of the Evangelical revival’s vigorous sensation of ‘brotherhood in Christ’ and the relentless energy of the missionary enterprise were fused into the ecumenical movement. Thus, work for unity was increasingly transformed from a rather apprehensive matter to an existential force. In Mott, there are no visible traces of narrow denominationalism or confessionalism. Here, awareness that the faith of others always had an enriching potential was coupled with personal generosity. While being a child of the diversities of late modernity, he eschewed extreme positions in order to promote reconciliation. Without trying to make a saint of him, there is much evidence that modern ecumenism would have been significantly different without John R. Mott.

**Edinburgh 1910: The Shaping of the Modern Ecumenical Movement**

It is commonly accepted that modern ecumenism grew out of the world mission movement. One might even suggest that the ecumenical venture owes more to the fervour for mission than to a longing for unity, which was rather poorly developed within many churches at that time. There were also examples of stern denominationalism among the
mission societies, and new divisions emerged in the mission fields. However, if 'the evangelization of the world in this generation' (Mott) was to be accomplished, cooperation and an allotment of tasks were needed. A number of missionaries cherished precious experiences of ecumenical fellowship and they often voiced a 'flexible pragmatism' which outweighed confessionalist sentiments. Furthermore, a growing number of people—not least within the 'younger churches' themselves—insisted that transference of Western schisms to other continents had to be avoided. Much of this was realized and operative prior to Edinburgh, but such convictions were undoubtedly enhanced during the Edinburgh process, and they were placed within an increasingly explicit and comprehensive ecumenical framework. One should perhaps not identify the 1910 conference as the birthplace of the ecumenical movement, as if nothing had happened in the field earlier, but it most certainly played an indispensable role in the initial shaping and endorsing of modern ecumenism.

The Third Ecumenical Missionary Conference, according to its formal title, convened in Scotland's capital city in June 1910. It took place under the skilful leadership of Mott, who chaired most of the sessions, and Oldham, who served as a strategically gifted secretary. The participants were officially appointed delegates of missionary societies who worked among 'non-Christian peoples'; proselytizing missions were deliberately avoided. Admittedly, the audience was densely Anglo-American and largely Evangelical. Only seventeen delegates came from the 'younger churches'. Roman Catholics and Orthodox were not invited—and would most likely not have come even if they had been asked. Yet, there were constructive attempts to adjust these biases. Several Anglicans, even some Anglo-Catholics, participated as representatives of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel and similar agencies. The few envoys from the south had crucial tasks throughout the conference programme and included future ecumenical leaders such as V. S. Azariah (1874–1945), who in 1912 became the first Indian bishop in the Anglican Communion. There were even some express wishes for a Catholic and Orthodox presence. At any rate, the former practice of gathering mainly with persons of similar experiences and views was changed.

Since it had been agreed in advance that controversial questions of doctrine and order should be avoided, there were limitations to the discussions. However, a number of essential and challenging topics were examined. During the extensive preparation process, eight focal points were singled out for closer attention. Of these, the last one—'Cooperation and the Promotion of Unity'—was clearly most pertinent in an ecumenical perspective, but the first ('Carrying the Gospel to all the Non-Christian World') and the second ('The Church in the Mission Field') were also of relevance here. Generally, what was said about collaboration in mission was applicable to collaboration between churches.

One of the most important practical results of the discussions on cooperation was an agreement to establish a Continuation Committee. This committee prepared the ground for the founding of the International Missionary Council in 1921, having been delayed by the First World War. At the end of the Edinburgh Conference, Charles H. Brent, an American Episcopalian missionary bishop who served in the Philippines, requested
that the causes of the divisions between the Churches should be more closely examined with a view to removing them and building unity. Through subsequent developments, particularly in the US, this initiative was essential in paving the way for the formation of Faith and Order in 1927. The lines from Edinburgh to the organization of Life and Work in 1925 are less evident. However, Oldham was appointed chairman of the research committee of the latter movement in 1934.

Accordingly, all the three main tributaries of the World Council of Churches—as well as the WCC itself—are associated with and partly derive from the meeting in Edinburgh. In this sense, also, the conference was essential in providing a basis for the breakthrough of ecumenism during the first half of the twentieth century. A number of its perspectives and findings may seem rather outmoded today, but ever since Edinburgh a firm link between unity and mission has been crucial to the modern ecumenical movement. This is the central legacy of the pioneering event of 1910 and its greatest gift to all later efforts to realize church unity.

In retrospect, the ecumenism of the period between 1850 and 1910 is marked by fluctuation and complexity. Yet the basic direction seems clear: while Faith and Order concerns were—and are—fundamental to the ecumenical venture, mission, together with Life and Work emphases on joint service in society, provided its engine. Generally, this era can be described in terms of an increasing shift from confessionalism to ecumenicity via the dynamism of the missionary enterprise. Obviously, denominationalism did not disappear, but it was thoroughly challenged, to the benefit of the church’s witness in the world.

References

Suggested Reading


CHAPTER 2

LAYING THE FOUNDATIONS: 1910–1948

TED A. CAMPBELL AND GARY B. MACDONALD

Introduction

This chapter considers the development of the ecumenical movement from the Edinburgh World Missionary Conference of 1910 to the inaugural assembly of the World Council of Churches in Amsterdam in 1948. This was a critical period in which the ecumenical movement progressed from a Protestant global gathering on collaboration in missionary work to an interrelated network of ongoing global structures representing multiple ecumenical trajectories on the part of a significant number of the world’s Christian communities.

These developments occurred in an era of unprecedented technological and cultural developments: long-distance radio transmissions (1901), powered aircraft (1903), Einstein’s special theory of relativity (1905), and the early growth of social sciences (Freud and Durkheim). By 1948, atomic bombs had been detonated and the first electronic digital computers had been switched on. The period also marked the zenith of modernist culture, typified in the startling simplicity and freedom from traditional design elements of modern art, music, and architecture (Connor 1989: 66–70). Modernism emphasized strongly centralized organizations both in business and in political structures. If the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was the most blatant example of this, a milder expression appeared in the fledgling League of Nations (1919) that spawned the United Nations in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War. But a parallel idea permeated large US businesses in the same era, when corporations adopted the form of a central organization with parallel regional distribution centres and local outlets.

The mood of the age seemed to be that the particularities of the past—regional, cultural, national, and religious particularities, even the particularities of smaller business organizations—were hindrances to the progress and unification that would make the benefits of modern technologies and modern cultures available to all.
The Edinburgh World Missionary Conference was intended to coordinate missionary work between traditionally divided Protestant communities in order to further the goal of global evangelization. But it spawned a nexus of non-Catholic western Christian leaders who propounded visions of Christian unity far beyond unity in mission work and began to put structures in place that would enable collaboration in multiple areas where divisions had prevented common work in the past.

The Edinburgh Conference inherited a distinctively Protestant version of the optimistic outlook of the late 1800s according to which Christ’s return would come only after (post) a millennium of progress on earth in which God’s kingdom would become increasingly visible (Moorhead 1999). Protestant leaders enunciated a confident sense that God’s work would triumph through the unity of Christian communities in the new century. More than a thousand people attended, representing more than 180 missionary organizations (History and Records 1910: 39–71). The Archbishop of Canterbury spoke at the opening session of the Conference and enunciated a postmillennial vision in the conclusion of his address: ‘it may well be that… “there be some standing here tonight who shall not taste of death till they see”—here on earth, in a new way we know not now—“the kingdom of God come with power”’ (Archbishop Randall Davidson, in History and Records 1910: 150).

Reports adopted by the Conference reveal the prejudices of the age, envisioning the world divided into west and east: ‘the Christian world’ and ‘the non-Christian world’, respectively. They paid much less attention to the global South, and reflected essentialized and stereotyped views of races and cultures in which missionary strategies were embedded (Stanley 2009: 303–309). The Conference established a Continuation Committee that was to become the nucleus of the International Missionary Council (IMC) a decade later (Stanley 2009: 277–302; Latourette 1986: 362).

The scope of the Edinburgh Conference was very deliberately limited. The term ‘Ecumenical’ had been proposed for the title of the Conference, but it was rejected in favour of ‘World’ because Anglo-Catholic participants representing the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel could not recognize it as a truly ‘ecumenical’ conference without Catholic representation (see Latourette 1986: 355–362). Planners of the Conference agreed in advance that explicit questions about Christian unity would not be part of its agenda (Stanley 2009: 36–41, especially 38). Despite this, the Conference served as a remarkably broad gathering of non-Catholic western Christian leaders.

Less than four months later, Episcopal Bishop Charles H. Brent (1862–1929) conceived the idea of an international conference on faith and order (Stanley 2009: 297; also Tatlow 1986: 407), and explicitly recalled his participation in Edinburgh in proposing this idea. On 19 October 1910, the Episcopal Church adopted a resolution calling for an international conference to address ‘questions touching Faith and Order’, a conference that would invite ‘all Christian Communions throughout the world which confess our Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour’ (Tatlow 1986: 407).
By August 1914, most of the nations of western Europe had been drawn into the First World War. Between nine and ten million people were killed and at least as many were wounded. Optimists might console themselves with the thought that it was a ‘war to end all wars’, but the war dealt a severe blow to the notion that modern technologies would be employed for the betterment of humankind.

The October Revolution in Russia followed. It suggested for the first time in political form that Christianity was not in fact working for the good of humankind but instead was an archaic detriment to human progress. This came as a shock to Christians who had been inclined to think of the twentieth century as ‘the Christian century’ (Coffman 2013: 12). Persecution of Christian leaders by the Soviet state compelled Eastern Orthodox Christian leaders more broadly to seek alliances with western Christian bodies. Christian communities questioned their own survival and began to reconsider their own efforts towards the amelioration of human life.

Four critical events occurred in 1920. In January, Metropolitan Dorotheus of Bursa, locum tenens of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, issued with the endorsement of the Holy Synod an encyclical letter addressed ‘Unto All the Churches of Christ Everywhere’. The letter is attributed to Archbishop Germanos Strenopoulos (1872–1951), who later became a president of the World Council of Churches. Stating the Orthodox conviction that the Orthodox churches are ‘the church’, the letter also addressed other Christian communities using the term ‘church’. It called for honest dialogue between Christian groups, and an institutional fellowship of churches as a platform for common work and dialogue (Neill 1986: 446; FitzGerald 2004: 104–106).

A second event of 1920 was the Lambeth Conference of bishops of the Anglican Communion, who issued ‘An Appeal to All Christian People’. The bishops stated that the war had caused Christian leaders ‘to think of the reunion of Christendom, not as a laudable ambition or a beautiful dream, but as an imperative necessity’ (Neill 1986: 447). Building on the earlier Chicago–Lambeth quadrilateral as a framework for Christian unity, the Anglican bishops’ Appeal suggested that the episcopacy might function as a means to Christian unity between the divided Christian communities (Neill 1986: 446–448).

The third and fourth third critical events were gatherings held in Geneva to begin planning for an international meeting on social issues (‘Life and Work’) facing the churches and for an international meeting on Faith and Order. The Geneva Life and Work meeting built on developments in previous decades. In 1891, Pope Leo XIII had issued his encyclical letter, Rerum Novarum, on the rights and duties of capital and labour (Pope Leo XIII 1891). In North America, the theology of the Social Gospel was growing, and British and European churches found intellectual sources for social justice within nascent socialist thought. From these roots a variety of regional efforts were
sparked, each working to further the novel idea that the whole of the life and work of humanity and society was a matter of Christian interest and responsibility.

The 1920 preparatory conference was in large part made possible by the steadfast efforts of Nathan Söderblom (1866–1931), later the Archbishop of Uppsala. Söderblom maintained that Christian efforts for social action were integral to Christian unity. Söderblom had organized church leaders from Denmark, Norway, Holland, and Switzerland to issue in 1917 a ‘Manifesto from Evangelical Churches in Neutral Countries’ calling for broad efforts for ‘a righteous and durable peace’ (Karlström 1986: 522). Eschewing confessional discussion, the 1920 conference debated issues of full ecumenicity, ultimately deciding that all Christian churches would be invited to what would be called the Universal Christian Conference on Life and Work, meeting in Stockholm on 19–30 August 1925.

Representatives of seventy churches, including Eastern Orthodox leaders, attended the 1920 Faith and Order meeting in Geneva. The meeting’s Continuation Committee determined to hold an international meeting in Lausanne in 1927 and established a Subjects Committee to consider the topics that might be taken up in the 1927 meeting. Their work adumbrated many of the central themes with which subsequent Faith and Order gatherings would be concerned (Tatlow 1986: 417–420). The following year (1921), the Continuation Committee from the Edinburgh World Missionary Conference organized the International Missionary Council (IMC) at a meeting in Lake Mohonk, New York. The IMC had its main office in London and John R. Mott (1865–1955) served as its first chair (Latourette 1986: 366–373).

Life and Work, and Faith and Order, in the 1920s

The organizers of the 1925 Stockholm Conference on Life and Work were clear that it would not address confessional or ecclesiological issues. Planners believed that a focus on social issues could foster unity among the churches without the problematic issues faced by Faith and Order. The ubiquitous phrase, ‘Doctrine divides, but service unites’, used by Söderblom but attributed originally to Hermann Kapler, became the call of the Life and Work movement (Karlström 1986: 540).

Organizers were also clear in their intention to go beyond the work of the World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches, founded at Constance, Switzerland, in 1914 (FitzGerald 2004: 87), and to deal with broader questions of practical life beyond that of peace and international friendship in accordance with the Gospel. The movement focused its work around the purpose of God for humanity and the duty of the church in relation to economic and industrial problems, social and moral problems, international relations, and Christian education, as well as methods of cooperative and federative effort.
The topics had been explored the year before in what became England’s contribution to Stockholm, namely the Conference on Christian Politics, Economics and Citizenship (COPEC) in April 1924. The COPEC conference was significant in its inclusion of Roman Catholics in the preparatory commissions (Reason 1924: 20), but official Roman Catholic representatives were not present at COPEC itself nor at the Stockholm conference. Germany did send official representatives to Stockholm, as did Eastern Orthodox churches, and there were a few representatives from Asian Protestant churches.

Theological disagreements arose despite intentions to avoid them, especially concerning the doctrine of the kingdom of God and the relationship of the church, humanity, and history to the divine kingdom. Such tensions notwithstanding, Stockholm was marked by significant fellowship and cooperation across national and denominational boundaries. Through its survey of social issues facing the world, the conference made the significant theological point of ‘the responsibility of the Churches for the whole life’ of humanity, putting before Christians the best of ecumenical social thought at the time (Ehrenström 1986: 550). The final message of the conference, calling for ‘full personal responsibility’ and ‘wider fellowship and co-operation’ in the midst of loyalty to one’s own church, was read on the closing day (Bell 1926: 714).

The conference voted to appoint a Continuation Committee, which became in 1930 the Universal Christian Council for Life and Work, organized ‘to perpetuate and strengthen the fellowship between the churches in the application of Christian ethics to the social problems of modern life’ (Ehrenström 1986: 553).

The first World Conference on Faith and Order was held at Lausanne from 3 to 21 August 1927. It included 385 men and nine women representing 108 different churches, including Eastern Orthodox churches (Bate 1927: 508–530; Tatlow 1986: 420–421). Bishop Brent was elected chair of the conference, but he was ill and passed leadership of the conference to the Congregational theologian, A. E. Garvie (Tatlow 1986: 421).

The conference was organized around seven subjects laid out by the Continuation Committee:

1. ‘The Call to Unity’
2. ‘The Church’s Message to the World: The Gospel’
3. ‘The Nature of the Church’
4. ‘The Church’s Common Confession of Faith’
5. ‘The Church’s Ministry’
6. ‘The Sacraments’

Discussions revealed problems that have characterized Faith and Order since that time. Eastern Orthodox representatives decided that they could not faithfully represent their churches and approve reports in any of the seven areas except ‘The Church’s Message to the World: The Gospel’ (Bate 1927: 382–386). Archbishop Germanos read a declaration on behalf of the Orthodox delegates, then sat down in tears. However,
Orthodox delegates did not openly oppose the reports of the conference, and allowed them to pass *nemine contradicente*—‘with no one opposing’ or ‘without dissent’ (Tatlow 1986: 423–424).

Many delegates to the Faith and Order conference believed that the conference intended to result in a single, unified church body. The conference had to clarify that its primary work was to further understanding of long-standing differences as well as points of unity in Christian faith and practice (Bate 1927: 387; Tatlow 1986: 423). Another matter of contention was the Anglo-American use of parliamentary order in contrast to other cultures that looked more for consensus (Tatlow 1986: 423–424). This, too, has remained a critical issue for the ecumenical movement beyond the work of Faith and Order. The conference made no plans for a joint eucharistic celebration, though many of the delegates presumed that this was the only possible, visible outcome it could have. Thus the conference began to recognize the complexity of issues that had divided Christian communities for centuries (Tatlow 1986: 424).

**Ecumenical Engagement in the 1930s**

The economic depression of the 1930s, the growing power of Soviet communism, the election of National Socialists in Germany in 1933, and tensions in Europe resulting from Hitler’s rise to power erased the last vestiges of hope that the previous war might have been a ‘war to end all wars’. The economic situation had a direct effect on ecumenical ventures. The Faith and Order Continuation Committee was unable to meet between 1932 and 1933 and its office in Geneva closed. Travel was prohibitively expensive for many delegates. In 1932, the Universal Christian Council for Life and Work postponed its planned conference from 1935 until 1937. Despite this, both the Council for Life and Work and the Faith and Order Continuation Committee pressed ahead with plans for further meetings. A joint committee was appointed to serve as a liaison between the groups (Tatlow 1986: 426). This eventually led to the decision to hold both of their next meetings in 1937.

The global situation gave new urgency to the ecumenical agenda of Life and Work. The Second World Conference of Life and Work, on the theme of ‘Church, Community and State’, convened in Oxford in July 1937, and addressed what was perceived as a world ‘going to pieces’, with society succumbing to disintegration (Oldham 1937: 67). The conference was not without opposition. Karl Barth was opposed to the effort. In a letter to Oxford organizer Willem A. Visser ’t Hooft, Barth wrote: ‘I am evidently not up to the particular logic and ethics and aesthetics of this business, and would prefer not to hear any more about it for a long time’. In his later reflections he dismissed the ecumenical effort as an exercise in compromise and accommodation (Busch 1975: 261–262).

The Oxford conference included 425 delegates, the majority of whom came from the United States and Britain, with others from throughout Europe, as well as from Africa,
Asia, Australia and Oceania, and South America; 300 were officially appointed by the churches (Ehrenström 1986: 588–589). Representatives from the German church were blocked from attending by Hitler himself (Barnes 1991: 101). The Catholic Church officially declined invitations to participate. Among the delegates was a large contingent of Christian laity, and a large block of youth (Oldham 1937: 11). Scholars produced advance papers on church and community, church and state, church and world, and on church, community and state in relation to education and the economic order (Ehrenström 1986: 584), and there was a volume by Visser ’t Hooft and J. H. Oldham, *The Church and its Function in Society* (Visser ’t Hooft and Oldham 1937). The conference produced six additional volumes of essays for use in the churches.

The conference worked to provide a realistic assessment of the role of religion in forming public commitment and action while retaining missionary notions of Christianity’s particular place in shaping the world and its international relations. Among its contributions was an understanding of the church as primarily an ecumenical society—a church within the churches—grounded in Christian mission, exemplified by the motto that came to be associated with the conference, ‘Let the Church be the Church!’ (Ehrenström 1986: 591). Fundamental unity would come not through finding agreement regarding social ethics, but through its sole dependence on Jesus Christ. As Visser ’t Hooft wrote: ‘Unity is not achieved; but it happens when men listen together to God, and when He is willing to give it to them’ (Visser ’t Hooft and Oldham 1937: 95; emphasis in original).

Guiding the conference’s understanding of the church’s social responsibility was the concept of ‘middle axioms’, which were meant to provide provisional moral directives within politics, economics, and society that took seriously the general ethical principles and virtues of Christian proclamation and the particular presenting political and economic circumstances. Oldham explained that middle axioms exist ‘between purely general statements of the ethical demands of the gospel and the decisions that have to be made in concrete situations’. Thus middle axioms functioned as ‘attempts to define the directions in which, in a particular state of society, Christian faith must express itself’ (Visser ’t Hooft and Oldham 1937: 209–210).

The Faith and Order Continuation Committee had continued to work in preparation for its 1937 World Conference. Bishop Brent died after the Lausanne meeting and William Temple, then Archbishop of York, became the chair of the Continuation Committee, which appointed a theological study group to weigh the responses of churches to the seven declarations of the 1927 conference. This process proved to be fruitful for the work of the 1937 conference and became a consistent modus operandi for Faith and Order work.

The Second World Conference on Faith and Order met in Edinburgh, from 3 to 18 August 1937, with representatives of 123 churches, including 344 official delegates, eighty-five alternates, and fifty-three youth who had been invited parallel to the youth delegation at the Life and Work conference (Hodgson 1938: 281–311; Tatlow 1986: 431). The conference focused on four topics for which preliminary responses had been
prepared and a fifth topic on ‘The Communion of Saints’ that emerged during the conference. The reports issued in these five areas were as follows:

1. ‘The Grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ’ on issues of human nature and salvation, justification, sanctification, and the expression sola gratia.
2. ‘The Church of Christ and the Word of God’ on issues of scripture and tradition.
3. ‘The Communion of Saints’ on issues of the veneration of saints and prayers addressed to saints.
4. ‘The Church of Christ: Ministry and Sacraments’ on the number of sacraments and particular issues related to baptism, Eucharist, and Christian ministry.
5. ‘The Church’s Unity in Life and Worship’ on the nature of the church and forms of visible unity, including the issue of intercommunion (Hodgson 1938: 224–269).

In addition, the conference adopted nemine contradicente an ‘Affirmation of Union in Allegiance to Our Lord Jesus Christ’ summarizing its findings (Hodgson 1938: 275–276).

The 1937 meetings of Life and Work and Faith and Order had been deliberately planned as concurrent, and negotiations prior to 1937 had raised the possibility of their proposing a larger structure under which their work could be carried on. In 1936, the Universal Council for Life and Work and the Continuation Committee of Faith and Order established a joint ‘Committee of 35’ persons who met in London prior to the 1937 conferences and adopted a very brief sketch of a World Council of Churches (WCC). This was brought to both 1937 conferences and adopted by them (Hodgson 1938: 270–274). Each conference appointed seven delegates to form a Committee of Fourteen which put into effect the sketch of a World Council to which the groups had agreed.

These fourteen delegates met on 13 May 1938 in Utrecht, and set up a provisional constitution and a provisional structure for the Council. They agreed that the new Council would not function as a ‘Super-Church’; it would not have authority to adopt legislation binding on member groups. They accepted a portion of the initial mandate from the Faith and Order conferences as a provisional Basis for the World Council: ‘The World Council of Churches is a fellowship of Churches which accept our Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour’ (Visser ‘t Hooft 1986: 705), and proposed that a formal organizational assembly should be held in 1941. In the autumn of that year, a Provisional Committee of the World Council of Churches in Process of Preparation was established, offices in Geneva were set up, and the proposed constitution of the WCC was sent out to the churches that had participated in the 1937 Faith and Order and Life and Work meetings, accompanied by a letter from Archbishop Temple, who became Archbishop of Canterbury the following year.

In July 1939, the Provisional Committee and the World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches sponsored a small meeting of Christian leaders to address the growing international conflicts. They adopted a statement pleading for the use of ‘negotiation, conference, and methods of conciliation’ as the preferred
means of dealing with international conflicts (Visser ’t Hooft 1986: 707). Six weeks later, on September 1, Germany invaded Poland and the Second World War began.

**Ecumenical Developments During and Subsequent to the Second World War**

With the beginning of the war in Europe, it became clear that an organizational assembly could not possibly be held in 1941. But the provisional organization was at work throughout the war, involved with relief efforts for refugees and prisoners and even with transmitting information to agents of resistance movements in Europe. By 1942, the leadership of the WCC was already thinking about post-war reconstruction. Visser ’t Hooft observed that,

> Paradoxically, it was in [the war] years that [the provisional Council] learned to stand on its own feet, and live from day to day in the conviction that the Lord would continue to gather his children together (Visser ’t Hooft 1986: 712).

After the war, the Council’s involvement in reconstruction efforts in Europe led to significant growth of its Geneva-based staff. It was also involved in the reorganization of German churches through the presence of WCC leaders in Stuttgart in October 1945, when German churches formally renounced their connections to the ‘German Christian’ movement associated with Nazism and requested the assistance of the Council in restructuring their churches (Visser ’t Hooft 1986: 714–716). Moreover, the work of the International Missionary Council (IMC) had become more consciously allied with the work of the nascent World Council of Churches through the 1930s, and by 1947 the IMC and the WCC declared themselves to be ‘in association with’ each other (Visser ’t Hooft 1986: 717; also Latourette 1986: 372).

**The Organizational Assembly of the World Council of Churches (Amsterdam 1948)**

The first General Assembly of the United Nations was held in Methodist Central Hall, Westminster, on 10 January 1946. The very next month, the Provisional Committee for the WCC met in Geneva and set the summer of 1948 in Amsterdam as the date and
venue for its organizational assembly. The committee issued a ‘Call to the Churches’ in 1947, and in preparation for the assembly four studies were commissioned, on the following topics:

1. ‘The Universal Church in God’s Design’
2. ‘The Church’s Witness to God’s Design’
3. ‘The Church and the Disorder of Society’
4. ‘The Church and the International Disorder’ (WCC 1948c).

The first two topics can be seen as Faith and Order issues; the third and fourth topics represent Life and Work issues and reflect the particular situation of communities at the conclusion of the Second World War.

The Assembly convened on 22 August 1948, in Amsterdam. It included representatives from 147 churches and forty-seven countries. Its membership was overwhelmingly Protestant and Anglican, though the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople and the Orthodox Church of Greece were represented (WCC 1948b). The Council elected Mott as honorary chair of the assembly and Visser ’t Hooft as its first General Secretary.

The Council was formally established on the next day, 23 August, by a resolution ‘that the formation of the World Council of Churches be declared to be and is hereby completed’ (Visser ’t Hooft 1986: 720). It confirmed the 1938 decision to utilize the earlier language from Faith and Order as the Basis of the WCC, and adopted a constitution for the Council with the Basis as its first sentence (WCC 1948a, 91). It affirmed its relationship to the IMC (Visser ’t Hooft 1986: 720–721) and adopted reports in each of the four areas already listed (WCC 1948a).

The World Council of Churches was born out of the postmillennial optimism that Protestants brought into the twentieth century and the cataclysms that followed: the First World War, the rise of the Soviet state, the global economic depression of the 1930s, the rise of German National Socialism, the Second World War, and the devastation throughout the world wrought by the war. If the optimism inherited from the late nineteenth century was stifled by the crises of the early twentieth century, those very crises served to make the need for collaboration between Christian communities painfully evident and thus they served in their own way as an impetus for unity.

References


Suggested Reading


CHAPTER 3

PIVOTAL YEARS:
1948–1965

LORELEI F. FUCHS

INTRODUCTION

The years between the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh in 1910 and the formation of the World Council of Churches (WCC) in Amsterdam in 1948, bear witness to a certain conversion of Christians and their churches. Already in the nineteenth century, churches throughout the world with roots in a common confessional tradition entered into association with one another. The mid-twentieth century brought about a move that crossed confessional lines: from ecclesial isolation and estrangement to ecumenical rapprochement and reconciliation. It demonstrated that ‘Christians have decided to overcome their ancient divisions, showing it is possible to be reconciled despite the faults committed in the past by all’ (Kasper 2008).

Three ecumenical streams flowing from the Edinburgh conference nurtured this initiative and shaped the modern ecumenical movement: the International Missionary Council (IMC), Faith and Order, and Life and Work. Initially, participants in the movement were redominantly Anglo-American and European, Western Caucasian male and Protestant. Orthodox and Catholics were not invited to Edinburgh. Thereafter, Orthodox Churches were represented in many gatherings and in 1961 at the WCC’s Third Assembly a majority of Orthodox Churches became members of the Council. Since then, Orthodoxy has maintained a strong presence in the WCC and participated fully in its work. Until the 1961 assembly, the Catholic Church was not present, either because it was not invited or because it declined, but unofficial observers attended some meetings. The Catholic Church’s departure from ecclesial isolation and estrangement and coming to ecumenical rapprochement and reconciliation was the result of another twentieth-century phenomenon, the Second Vatican Council (1962–65). Preceding initiatives readied the Catholic Church to embrace the ecumenical movement and the
Council was announced by Pope John XXIII at the close of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity on 25 January 1959 (Alberigo and Komonchak 1995: 1). The present chapter considers key moments between the founding of the World Council of Churches in 1948 and the closing of Vatican II in 1965.

**The Formative Years, 1948–1960: Ecumenism in Conciliar Context and ‘Catholic Ecumenism’**

‘We intend to stay together’ stated the message to the churches from the World Council of Churches’ First Assembly in 1948 in Amsterdam (Visser ’t Hooft 1949: 9; compare *Dictionary*: 123). At the assembly, Faith & Order and Life & Work merged to form the WCC. Thereby the member churches of the Council entered into a fellowship with one another that signalled reconciliation. The International Missionary Council worked collaboratively with the WCC until 1961, when it was integrated into the Council during the latter’s Third Assembly.

By the time of the Amsterdam gathering, Faith & Order and Life & Work had devoted almost thirty years to ecumenism, during which time they discerned the possibility of merger. Their conferences of 1937 established a committee to oversee the ‘WCC “in process of formation”’ (*Dictionary*: 1224). The committee chair was Anglican archbishop, William Temple, and its secretary was Dutch Reformed minister, Willem Visser ’t Hooft, both of whom, like many ecumenical pioneers, grew into ecumenism as members of the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF). Temple had been a prominent figure in Faith and Order since its first conference (Lausanne, 1927) and at the IMC’s first conference (Jerusalem, 1928). Visser ’t Hooft had been general secretary of the WSCF and assistant to the YMCA chair, John Mott. With their leadership, the WCC was constituted on 23 August 1948 in the presence of 351 assembly delegates from 147 churches and forty-four countries, plus staff, consultants, fraternal delegates, observers, and accredited visitors. Every church tradition was present except one. Catholics were invited, but the Vatican’s Holy Office forbade their attendance.

The coming into existence of a World Council of Churches gave the modern ecumenical movement its initial identity. Interchurch dialogue, cooperation, and mission could take place within a multilateral context. Churches entered into a conciliar relationship that was covenantal. Adopted by the inaugural assembly, the original Constitution of the WCC opened with a Basis that stated: ‘The World Council of Churches is a fellowship of churches which accept our Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour’ (Visser ’t Hooft 1949: 197). Articles following the Basis delineated the structures of conciliar fellowship. Understanding the Council as a ‘fellowship of churches’ found its origin in Orthodoxy. In 1920, the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople issued an encyclical, ‘Unto the
Churches of Christ Everywhere’, calling for a ‘league (fellowship [koinonia]) between the churches’ (Ecumenical Movement: 11–15). In theological discourse, the multivalent Greek word ‘κοινωνία’ embraces the notion that unity is a God-given gift that manifests itself in a God-given diversity. As a ‘koinonia of churches’, the WCC was to serve the churches in deepening their oneness of faith, life, and witness in Christ.

First Assembly, Amsterdam 1948

The theme of the First Assembly, ‘Man’s Disorder and God’s Design’, was expressive of the current state of both church and world: a divided church and a broken world. Denominationalism fractured ecclesial relations and war scarred secular relations. Within that dual context the assembly organized four study sections.

I. ‘The Universal Church in God’s Design’ identifies unity as God’s ‘creation and not human achievement’ and affirms that ‘notwithstanding our divisions, we are one in Jesus Christ’ (Visser ’t Hooft 1949: 51). That given oneness contextualizes differences on Scripture, tradition, ecclesial structure and oversight, and the doctrine of justification, which often stem from a certain ‘catholic-protestant divide’ (52).

II. ‘The Church’s Witness to God’s Design’ opens with a Christocentric declaration that ‘God’s purpose is to reconcile all to himself and to one another in Christ’ (64). Divided, the church fails to speak with a credible voice on situations that bear upon the human community and cannot fulfill its task of evangelism and mission (66).

III. ‘The Church and the Disorder of Society’ describes the disorder resulting from the unfulfilled promises of capitalism and communism. It recalls the church’s responsibility in helping people ‘to achieve fuller personal life within the technical society’ (75), and calls for the construction of a ‘responsible society’ where ‘freedom is the freedom of men who acknowledge responsibility to justice and public order’ (77).

IV. ‘The Church and the International Disorder’ states the conviction that, despite the shattered hopes of peace, ‘Every person has a place in the Divine purpose’ (88). World division is named as the greatest threat to peace, and ‘elements in all systems’ that ‘contravene the First Commandment’ are condemned (91). The section acknowledges the God-given rights of equality for all people and appeals for the safeguarding of freedom of religion and conscience.

WCC Central Committee Meeting, Toronto 1950

Already before Amsterdam, questions arose concerning the relationship between the churches and a World Council of Churches. Given misunderstandings among the member churches and misrepresentations among outside critics, the WCC Central Committee
probed the issue in a 1950 meeting in Toronto. Its conclusion was the document, *The Church, the Churches and the World Council of Churches: The Ecclesiological Significance of the World Council of Churches*. This ‘Toronto Statement’ defines the nature and mission of the WCC vis-à-vis the one church of Christ and the many churches that confess him as God and Saviour. Essentially, it was a declaration of what the Council is and is not, key points being: ‘The World Council of Churches is not and must never become a Super-Church’ (III.1). Its purpose is ‘to bring the Churches into living contact with each other’ (III.2). The WCC has no ecclesiology of its own (III.3), therefore no church is obliged to change its ecclesiology (III.4), nor to accept ‘a specific doctrine concerning the nature of Church unity’ (III.5). The basis for fellowship in the WCC is ‘the common recognition that Christ is the Divine Head of the Body’ (IV.1). ‘[M]embership of the Church of Christ is more inclusive than the membership of [one’s] own Church body’ (IV.3), but this does not imply ‘that each Church must regard the other member Churches as Churches in the true and full sense of the word’ (IV.4). However, they ‘recognize in other Churches elements of the true Church’ (IV.5) (van der Bent 1994: 440). The WCC Third Assembly (1961) confirmed the Toronto Statement ‘because it still best expresses our understanding of the Council’s nature’ (Visser ’t Hooft 1962: 131).

### Third World Conference on Faith and Order, Lund 1952

After two conferences, Faith and Order departed from a comparative method of dialogue. Meeting in Lund, Sweden, in 1952, its Third World Conference embraced a Christological method, discerning convergence and agreement from divergence and disagreement, as a response to Amsterdam’s conviction that ‘Christ has made us his own and he is not divided. In seeking him we find one another’ (Visser ’t Hooft 1949: 9). The churches considered biblical, historical, and contextual aspects of doctrine, worship, mission, and evangelism which either enrich or impoverish unity, and the Christological perspective advanced ecumenical understanding of the church (Tomkins 1953: 17–22).

The conference’s most consequential contribution was a dual question posed to the churches that came to be known as the Lund Principle: ‘Should not our churches ask themselves whether they are showing sufficient eagerness to enter into conversation with other churches and whether they should not act together in all matters except those in which deep differences of conviction compel them to act separately?’ (Tomkins 1953: 16) Frequently quoted and interpreted, the principle has also endured misquotation and misinterpretations that lose its ‘original intention’, namely, ‘to challenge the churches to talk together so that they could come to act together’ (*Dictionary*, 715).

### Second Assembly, Evanston 1954

Evanston, Illinois, was the venue for the WCC Second Assembly in 1954, with the theme ‘Christ—Hope of the World.’ The assembly sought to deepen Amsterdam’s intention of
'staying together' by the resolves of ‘keeping together’ and ‘growing together’ (Visser ‘t Hooft 1955: 91). Evanston’s six study sections thereby advanced the work of Amsterdam and Lund.

I. ‘Faith and Order: Our Oneness in Christ and our Disunity as Churches’ brought Lund’s findings to the assembly’s wider representation of churches. Experience of fellowship in the Council heightened awareness of their oneness in Christ, a ‘given unity’ with the triune God and with all the church (Visser ‘t Hooft 1955: 85).

II. ‘Evangelism: The Mission of the Church to Those Outside Her Life’ refers to the ‘evangelising Church’ whose task is to proclaim the gospel so as to transform society in accord with God’s plan (101). It names as evangelism’s ‘exploring frontiers’ the renewal of inner life, the witnessing laity, Christian education, chaplaincies, parish experiments, media of mass communication, and a trained ministry (103–105).

III. ‘Social Questions: The Responsible Society in a World Perspective’ clarifies what Amsterdam meant by a ‘responsible society’. It indicates ‘a criterion by which we judge all existing social orders and at the same time a standard to guide us in the specific choices we have to make’ (113). The study also considered the church vis-à-vis communist/non-communist tensions.

IV. ‘International Affairs: Christians in the Struggle for World Community’ proclaims ‘the Christian hope in an hour of grave international crisis’ of conflicting social and political systems and opposing ideologies (130). It affirms Christian commitment to ‘peace…characterised…by freedom, justice, truth and love’ (132).

V. ‘Intergroup Relations: The Churches amid Racial and Ethnic Tensions’ addresses the restlessness in the world wounded by racial and ethnic hatreds, jealousies, and suspicions. It connects the human search for hope with Christian hope found in Christ which is all-reconciling.

VI. ‘The Laity: The Christian in his Vocation’ highlights the missionary task of the laity, which ‘bridges the gulf between church and world’ (164).

North American Conference on Faith and Order, Oberlin 1957

In preparation for the Fourth World Conference on Faith and Order in Montreal in 1963, a North American Conference on Faith and Order was held in Oberlin, Ohio, in 1957. It was the first ecumenical gathering attended by authorized Roman Catholic observers. The US Conference of the WCC, under the leadership of Presbyterian minister, Samuel McCrea Cavert, invited the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA (NCC) and the Canadian Council of Churches to co-sponsor the conference. Its theme, ‘The Nature of the Unity We Seek’, was suggested by Lutheran pastor, Franklin Clark Fry, an NCC executive.
Oberlin's 'background' was the Faith and Order movement. Its 'foreground' was the diverse ecclesial landscape of North America (Minear 1958: 11). The conference studied Faith and Order findings since the Lausanne conference of 1927 and fostered their local reception. To that end, 'great strides were made in understanding doctrinal and confessional problems, the nature and organization of the church, and the cultural factors influencing the mission of the church.' The conference did not 'formulate specific recommendations for Christian unity' (Minear 1958, jacket). Rather, appealing to the Lund Principle, Oberlin sought the given unity found in Christ amidst the disunity of churches in North America. Two plenary sessions were devoted to studies on Montreal's agenda: Christ and the Church, and Tradition and the Traditions.

In 2007, celebrating fifty years of Faith and Order in the US, the Faith and Order Commission of the NCC returned to Oberlin for a second conference, the theme of which was 'On Being Christian Together: The Faith and Order Experience in the United States'.

‘Catholic Ecumenism’

Catholic engagement in ecumenism was not totally absent during those early years. Individuals participated, often without approval, but there was also some institutional, even official presence, which intimated a change in the Catholic Church's stance.

An early participant was Yves Congar, whose *Chrétiens désunis* was published in 1937. Other writings followed, some censored. A turnabout came when Pope John XXIII named Congar an expert (*peritus*) for Vatican II. His influence is evident in Council documents, specifically *Lumen Gentium*, *Dei Verbum*, and *Unitatis Redintegratio*. Another pioneer was George Tavard, who attended various ecumenical gatherings, including the 1954 assembly. The Montreal conference was the first event he attended as an official Catholic observer, and he too was a *peritus* at Vatican II.

The official Catholic observers at Oberlin were Jesuits John Courtney Murray and Gustave Weigel. In 1961, Weigel published *A Catholic Primer on the Ecumenical Movement*. Murray sought to reconcile Catholicism and religious freedom. Despite being silenced for his earlier views, Murray was the lead drafter of Vatican II’s Declaration on Religious Liberty, *Dignitatis Humanae*. Among papal gestures at that time, two in 1960 stand out: Pope John XXIII received the Archbishop of Canterbury, Geoffrey Fisher, at the Vatican and, in preparation for the council, he established the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity (SPCU), appointing a German cardinal, Augustin Bea, as president, and Dutch priest, Jan Willebrands, as secretary.

Those early years also witnessed a most significant structure of 'Catholic ecumenism', namely, the Catholic Conference for Ecumenical Questions (CCEQ). Established in Utrecht in 1952, it discussed questions at annual conferences with scholars and leaders of Catholic ecumenism. Four factors account for its pioneering role at a time when the Catholic Church was not favourable to ecumenical dialogue and action. First, its innovative character: developing Catholic reflection and initiating dialogue with the WCC. Secondly, the CCEQ was international and scholarly, which attracted many theologians,
and encouraged them to take part in its decision-making. Thirdly, the profile of the CCEQ could hardly be described as institutional, since it was mainly constituted by the activity of one man, Johannes Willebrands. Lastly, the Holy See was always duly informed (Jacobs 2003: 10).

Two Dutch priests were the prime movers of the CCEQ: Willebrands, later a cardinal and eventually president of the SPCU, and Frans Thijssen. Both were members of the Association of St Willibrord, founded in 1948 to promote rapprochement among churches in the Netherlands. Assisting them in establishing the CCEQ was Yves Congar, who ‘asked that greater attention be given to the presence of other elements of the Church (vestigia Ecclesiae) beyond the visible frontiers of the Catholic Church’ (Jacobs 2003, 10). Willebrands met with leaders of the WCC and other ecumenical bodies and with denominational leaders and ecumenically minded Christians. The CCEQ became a bridge to the deliberations of Vatican II, passing on the results of its meetings to those who would participate in the Council. While Vatican II was in session in 1963, the CCEQ met for the last time and its work transferred to the SPCU.

The Expanding Years, 1961–1965: Conciliar Ecumenism Matures and the Catholic Church Embraces the Ecumenical Movement

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, while the WCC was preparing for its next assembly and for a world conference on Faith and Order, preparations were underway in Rome for an ecumenical gathering of a different sort. The Catholic Church was readying itself for Vatican II. Little did either side know of the other, but the three events they prepared made a lasting impact on Christians and their churches.

Third Assembly, New Delhi 1961

‘Jesus Christ, the Light of the World’ was the theme of the WCC Third Assembly in New Delhi in 1961. Expanding the Basis to include Scripture and the Trinitarian formula indicates a certain maturity in its self-understanding as a Council, and mention of ‘confession,’ ‘Lord,’ ‘Scripture,’ ‘calling,’ and ‘Trinity’ reflects a sharper sense of fellowship: ‘The World Council of Churches is a fellowship of churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour according to the Scriptures and therefore seek to fulfil together their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit’ (Visser ’t Hooft 1962: 426). That maturity and sharper sense were not static. There was what T. K. Thomas called a ‘developmental continuity’ in the member churches’
experience and understanding of conciliar fellowship that lent itself to a 'basis beyond the Basis' (*Dictionary*, 1239). Also signalling a maturing process were the assembly’s integration of the International Missionary Council into the WCC and the issues treated in the reports of its three study sections.

I. The report of the section on Witness addresses the ecumenical/interfaith question. It juxtaposes the 'urgency of the Church’s evangelistic task' of proclaiming the Gospel and the reality of other 'living faiths' (Visser ‘t Hooft 1962: 77, 82). This tension continues to preoccupy the WCC.

II. The report of the section on Service states that 'Christian service, as distinct from the world's concept of philanthropy, springs from and is nourished by God's costly love as revealed by Jesus Christ' (93). The section then wrestles with the problems of political, economic, and social change as they affect the 'Third World.'

III. The report of the section on Unity contains New Delhi's most significant ecumenical legacy. Its second paragraph, which defines unity as divine gift and human calling, remains central to conciliar ecumenism:

We believe that the unity which is both God’s will and his gift to his Church is being made visible as all in each place who are baptized into Jesus Christ and confess him as Lord and Saviour are brought by the Holy Spirit into one fully committed fellowship, holding the one apostolic faith, preaching the one Gospel, breaking the one bread, joining in common prayer, and having a corporate life reaching out in witness and service to all and who at the same time are united with the whole Christian fellowship in all places and all ages in such wise that ministry and members are accepted by all, and that all can act and speak together as occasion requires for the tasks to which God calls his people.

The report added: 'It is for such unity that we believe we must pray and work' (116).

At New Delhi, the WCC became a real 'mouthpiece of the member churches.' ‘This was shown in a renewed stand on religious liberty, a resolution on anti-Semitism, a common stand on the international crisis, a message to Christians in South Africa, and in an “Appeal to all Governments and Peoples” ’ (van der Bent 1994: 505). The Catholic connection with New Delhi prefigured the Catholic Church’s embrace of the ecumenical movement. It was the first global ecumenical gathering to which the Vatican sent official observers, just one year before the opening of Vatican II.

**Fourth World Conference on Faith and Order, Montreal 1963**

Meeting in Montreal in 1963, the Fourth World Conference on Faith and Order was an intense gathering with a full agenda. ‘The Conference itself’, said American Methodist Albert Outler, ‘will be an experiment in dialogue’ (Rodger and Vischer 1964: 12). It received reports of commissions on Institutionalism, Christ and the Church, Worship,
and Tradition and Traditions that overarched its five study sections, and their respective reports, as follows:

I. ‘The Church in the Purpose of God’ describes the relationship of Christ, the church, and the world. ‘The good news of the Church is that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself.' The church is the ‘new creation’ in service to the world (42).

II. ‘Scripture, Tradition and Traditions’ considers the relationship of Scripture and tradition, and it distinguishes meanings of the latter. ‘By the Tradition is meant the Gospel itself, transmitted from generation to generation in and by the Church, Christ himself present in the life of the Church. By tradition is meant the traditionsary process. The term traditions is used . . . to indicate both the diversity of forms of expression and also what we call confessional traditions’ (50).

III. ‘The Redemptive Work of Christ and the Ministry of his Church’ draws on the biblical notion of the priesthood of the whole people of God to connect Christ’s mission and ministry with that of the church.

IV. ‘Worship and the Oneness of Christ’s Church’ registers the conviction that Christian worship is an encounter of fellowship with the Triune God and with one another. This section also recognizes disagreements among the churches particularly regarding Holy Communion.

V. ‘ “All in Each Place”: The Process of Growing Together’ states that the ‘proving ground of unity is the local church’ (80).

The Catholic connection with Montreal was matchless. Prior to the conference, the WCC invited Catholic theologians to the Ecumenical Institute in Bossey, Switzerland, to discuss conference themes. The Vatican then sent to Montreal official observers who participated actively in its proceedings. Some of those observers were advisors (periti) to Vatican II, which held its second session in 1963. Present at Vatican II were non-Catholic observers, some of whom were delegates to the Montreal conference. The seemingly fortuitous end result was the mutual informing and forming between conference and council. A poignant example is the influence of Montreal’s study of Scripture, Tradition and traditions on Vatican II’s Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, Dei Verbum (see Mullins 2005).

Second Vatican Council, 1962–1965

From this brief tracing of ecumenical history one can conclude that, despite its wariness of non-Catholic Christians and its view of reunion as ‘returning to the fold’, the Catholic Church had an ecumenical impulse prior to Vatican II. It was the Second Vatican Council, however, that sealed the Catholic Church’s irrevocable commitment (see Pope John Paul II 1995: n. 3) to Christian unity and the ecumenical movement in its Decree on Ecumenism, Unitatis Redintegratio (Second Vatican Council 1964b, hereafter UR).
Girding that stance are the conciliar documents on the Church, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Lumen Gentium (Second Vatican Council 1964, hereafter LG, e.g. n. 1) and the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, Gaudium et Spes (Second Vatican Council 1965, hereafter GS, e.g. nn. 24, 42, 92).

Departing from former understanding, Vatican II opened the way for the Catholic Church’s entry into the ecumenical movement, a movement ‘fostered by the grace of the Holy Spirit, for the restoration of unity among all Christians’ (UR 1). No longer identified in the negative (e.g. in schism, belonging to sects), non-Catholic Christians were ‘separated brethren’, brothers and sisters in other churches or ecclesial communities, where there also exist ‘elements and endowments which . . . give life to the Church itself’ (UR 3). So, while ‘the one Church of Christ . . . subsists in the Catholic Church’, ‘many elements of sanctification and of truth are found outside of its visible structure. These elements, as gifts belonging to the Church of Christ, are forces impelling toward catholic unity’ (LG 8). Acknowledging degrees of unity among Christian churches opened the way for dialogue and cooperation.

The Council describes unity in terms of ‘communion’ or ‘fellowship’. Unitatis Redintegratio names three essential elements of this fellowship: ‘confessing the one faith’, ‘celebrating divine worship in common’, and ‘keeping the fraternal harmony of the family of God’ (UR 2). Those baptized in other Christian communities ‘are in communion with the Catholic Church even though this communion is imperfect [in quodam cum Ecclesia catholica communione, etsi non perfecta]’ (UR 3). Promoting Christian unity and seeking the restoration of unity, then, are the tasks of ecumenism (UR 4). Unitatis Redintegratio 4 offers a sine qua non of unity that readily applies both ad intra and ad extra:

All in the Church must preserve unity in essentials. But let all, according to the gifts they have received enjoy a proper freedom, in their various forms of spiritual life and discipline, in their different liturgical rites, and even in their theological elaborations of revealed truth. In all things let charity prevail.

Tensions within the Catholic Church and mistrust from without notwithstanding, the ecumenical aggiornamento of Vatican II has impacted all Christians and their churches. The Council’s term ‘separated brethren’ itself opened relationships. Before, during, and after Vatican II, the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity broadened the ecumenical horizon. Consequent to the Council, the Catholic Church has engaged in every aspect of ecumenism. Multilateral relations with the WCC are conducted through a Joint Working Group, established in 1965. The Joint Working Group discusses issues of common interest and promotes cooperation. The Catholic Church also collaborates with WCC groups on mission and unity, and on interreligious dialogue and cooperation, and it is a member of the WCC’s Faith and Order Commission. Spiritual ecumenism also evolved. For example, preparation of resources for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity became a joint effort of the WCC and the SPCU. Praying not only for but with fellow Christians has since become an ecumenical norm. A critical ecumenical advance made in light of Vatican II has been the maturing of bilateral relations. Although
some churches engaged in one-to-one conversations, it was the Catholic Church that
gave bilateral dialogues their formal and official shape, by bringing Faith and Order con-
cerns to bilateral tables. By that theological modality, two confessional traditions dis-
cern convergences and divergences, agreement and disagreement, and distinguish
differences that are Church-dividing from those that are not. To those relationships and
conversations the Catholic Church brings Vatican II’s perception of ‘the signs of the
times’ (UR 4; compare GS 4).

**Pivotal Years of the ‘Ecumenical Century’: The Legacy of 1948–1965**

The formation of the World Council of Churches marked ‘a new epoch in the history of
our Christian faith’ (Editorial 1948: 1001), and the decision to celebrate Vatican II sig-
nalled ‘a dramatic epochal shift’ (Alberigo and Komonchak 1995: 503). So note the
chroniclers, referring respectively to the post-war times and to the ‘move out of the
post-war climate’ (Alberigo and Komonchak 1995: 503). The WCC and Vatican II both
understood their undertakings as following God’s will. The fellowship of WCC member
churches witnessed that there was no turning back to ecclesial isolation and estrange-
ment, as did the Catholic Church’s irrevocable commitment to Christian unity made at
Vatican II. The only way is forward, to deepening rapprochement so that reconciliation
may be realized in fullness.

The period between Amsterdam and Vatican II saw an awakening of the idea that to be
Christian is to be ecumenical. Regrettably, Christian identity is not always so perceived.
Too often ecumenism is seen as the hobby of theologians sympathetic to the idea of unity
and enthusiasts of the movement, rather than as the mandate of all, with biblical warrant
(e.g. John 17:21; Ephesians 4:4–6). Regrettably, the churches have waxed and waned in
their efforts to take seriously the Lund Principle, so that interchurch relationships might
actually make a difference to their own faith, life, and witness. For that difference to be
realized, a re-reception of what happened in the years 1948 to 1965 is essential.

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### Suggested Reading


CHAPTER 4

INTENSE ACTIVITY: 1965–1990

GÜNTHER GASSMANN

Introduction

Two historical events—the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council in 1965 and the unexpected demise of oppressive communist regimes in Eastern Europe in 1989/1990—may well serve to frame the period of ecumenical history to be surveyed here. A more directly ecumenical signpost for the end of this period would be the World Convocation on Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation in 1990.

The period 1965 to 1990 was ecumenically extremely intensive. There were more than a dozen world conferences with their often extensive preparations, many publications, numerous meetings, consultations, committees, and commissions, and major study projects. All of this was possible because considerable financial means were available from larger churches and their mission and development agencies as well as government funds. The programmes, finances, and staff of the World Council of Churches (WCC) had steadily increased (for instance, there were 369 staff positions in the 1980s), and there was a renewed awareness and experience that ecumenism does not live by finances alone but by the interest and support of committed Christians.

A NEW ECUMENICAL PARTNER: THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

The Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) and its ecumenical stance initiated the most profound and extensive broadening of the ecumenical movement in the latter’s history.
With its new and more biblically based ecclesiological positions, its partial recognition of other churches and ecclesial communities, and its explicit affirmation of the ecumenical movement and willingness to participate in it, the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) created a new situation and context in modern church history. This found expression at the institutional level in that the non-Catholic churches from now on had a concrete Roman counterpart—an ‘address’ in Rome—in the Vatican Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity (SPCU), founded in 1960 and renamed in 1984 as the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (PCPCU). This office has become a valuable instrument of the Vatican’s ecumenical relations and activities.

Another major instrument for monitoring and furthering RCC and WCC relationships was created in 1965, namely the Joint Working Group (JWG) between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches. In a way it became a substitute for the Roman Catholic membership of the WCC that was repeatedly asked for in WCC circles. The JWG studied the membership issue, and it became clear that there was quite a disparity between the WCC as a fellowship of independent national churches and the RCC as one church with a universal structure of teaching and governance. Furthermore, representation of the RCC, with a membership twice as large as that of the WCC, would have created enormous difficulties in the structure of the WCC. In 1972, the RCC decided not to ask for WCC membership, but suggested that collaboration be intensified.

The RCC indeed became more active as a partner of the WCC than many of the latter’s member churches. The JWG went beyond mutual information; it commissioned and received several important study documents during the period 1965–1990: ‘Common Witness and Proselytism’, 1970 (Joint Working Group 1971); Common Witness, 1982 (Joint Working Group 1982); ‘The Church: Local and Universal’, 1990 (Joint Working Group 1990a); and ‘The Notion of “Hierarchy of Truths”: An Ecumenical Interpretation’, 1990 (Joint Working Group 1990b). A first survey of ecumenical collaboration at local, national, and regional levels was published by the SPCU in 1975 with JWG input (Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity 1975) and the six reports of the JWG between 1965 and 1991 provide many examples of growing collaboration. The Fourth Report of 1975 used the formula of a ‘real but imperfect communion’, which became a standard phrase in RCC statements to indicate what has and what has not been achieved in ecumenical rapprochements (Joint Working Group 1976: 18).

In 1968, the WCC Assembly at Uppsala and the SPCU approved the full membership of twelve Catholic theologians in the WCC Commission on Faith and Order, a remarkable and singular step. Another effort in RCC–WCC collaboration was initiated at Uppsala by the appointment of a Joint Commission on Society, Development and Peace (SODEPAX) which was greeted with much enthusiasm and generous support. Because of differing concepts of the social-political framework of development work, the programme of SODEPAX was terminated in 1980. By 1990, the RCC was a full member of over thirty-five national councils of churches and three regional councils in the Caribbean, the Middle East, and the Pacific.
Ecumenical Social Action and Reflection

The period 1965–1990 was simultaneously marked by a strong sociopolitical orientation as well as by an equally strong theological-ecclesiological orientation, each claiming central ecumenical significance, with the sociopolitical orientation often enjoying stronger financial support and the preference of liberal western church administrators. Practical ecumenical action in response to massive social problems in our world has been an ecumenical priority since before the foundation of the WCC in 1948, and has been carried out by agencies such as the WCC Division of Inter-Church Aid, Refugee and World Service (thus renamed in 1961 to reflect its worldwide mandate). However, from the beginning of the modern ecumenical movement social action and service has been accompanied by theological and social-ethical reflection, and there were efforts in our period to relate both orientations (Mudge 2004).

Ecumenical social reflection in this period was affected by events and developments in world history, from the tragedy of the Vietnam War through the widening gap between rich and poor nations to the emergence of Latin American liberation theologies, which were highlighted by the 1968 Medellin conference of the Roman Catholic bishops of Latin America (CELAM). That conference, with its emphasis on the poverty of the church as ‘a sign of the inestimable value of the poor in the eyes of God’, paved the way for the ‘preferential option for the poor’ proclaimed by the 1979 CELAM conference at Puebla (Kim 2012: 29–42, 105), which became one of the most influential formulas in ecumenical social language. This world historical context was certainly a major reason for the impressive succession of WCC assemblies with a strong social-ethical emphasis, starting with a fanfare: the World Conference on Church and Society held in Geneva in 1966.

Its theme, ‘Christians in the Technical and Social Revolutions of our Time’, indicated the extension of ethical concern to the new technological-scientific environment, given the radical changes in society. It was one of the most controversial and perhaps most influential conferences in the history of the ecumenical movement, and constituted a turning point in the movement’s history by articulating critical positions over against European and North American social, political, and economic systems. It debated new themes—the nature and role of ideologies; community in modern urban, technical, and pluralistic societies; opposition to capitalist political and economic systems—and dealt with social-ethical issues within the eschatological horizon of God’s present and final judgement. There was a lively Catholic interest in the Geneva conference because of obvious convergences between ecumenical social thinking and Catholic social doctrine, as found, for example, in Vatican II and in the 1967 encyclical letter of Pope Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio*, with its famous statement that ‘development’ is ‘the new name for peace’ (Pope Paul VI 1967, subheading of n. 76).
The universal-historical dimension of Geneva 1966 was also the governing horizon of the three Assemblies of the WCC held during our period, in Uppsala 1968, Nairobi 1975, and Vancouver 1983, and was manifested most explicitly and theologically at Uppsala. In particular, Section III of Uppsala’s agenda, on ‘World Economic and Social Development’, and Section IV, ‘Towards Justice and Peace in International Affairs’, pursued themes from Geneva. A direct consequence of Uppsala was the establishment of the WCC Programme (and Special Fund) to Combat Racism in 1969—one of the most discussed and controversial ecumenical initiatives.

The year 1969 also saw WCC approval for a programme on ‘The Future of Man and Society in a World of Science-Based Technology’. This again signalled the extension of ecumenical social thinking into the areas of science and technology, and major issues in those fields were further considered at the 1974 WCC conference in Bucharest on ‘Science and Technology for Human Development: The Ambiguous Future and the Christian Hope’. At the WCC Assembly in Nairobi in 1975 the continuing emphasis on social issues and action had its main forum in Section V on ‘Structures of Injustice and Struggles for Liberation’ and in Section VI on ‘Human Development: Ambiguities of Power, Technology, and Quality of Life’. The Assembly saw lively debates on disarmament, the limits of growth—notably in light of the 1972 report for the Club of Rome, *The Limits to Growth* (Vischer 2004: 47)—and a remarkable social-theological reconsideration of nature and the environment, creation, and the exploitation of resources.

A new step was taken in 1976 with the WCC programme emphasis on a ‘Just, Participatory and Sustainable Society’ (JPSS), which took up the concept of a ‘just and sustainable society’, introduced at Bucharest in 1974 (Mudge 2004: 290), and was intended to hold together major WCC social concerns and to integrate them with biblical-theological perspectives. This in turn was followed up by the WCC conference on ‘Faith, Science and the Future’ held in 1979 at a place that was symbolic for the guiding orientation of the conference: the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in Cambridge MA. Nearly half of the many participants came from the fields of science and technology, and the conference produced a wealth of material. Its report culminated in a series of ethical reflections on faith, science, technology, cultural values, justice and sustainability, the use of scarce resources, human ‘dominion’ and stewardship of creation, the kingdom of God and human decisions and political actions, and appropriate social policies for churches (Shinn and Abrecht 1980, vol. 2, 147–165).

The next WCC Assembly at Vancouver in 1983 was influenced by the 1979 MIT conference, the worsening world economic situation, and the enormous financial investment in armaments for the sake of ‘security’. Accordingly, the relationship between peace and justice was highlighted more dramatically than ever before because ‘without justice for all everywhere we shall never have peace anywhere’ (Gill 1983: 132–133). The development of the international economic order was interpreted in extreme language as ‘idolatry, stemming from human sin, a product of satanic forces’ (Gill 1983: 84). The programme priority of ‘Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation’ (JPIC) announced by the WCC at Vancouver (Gill 1983: 255) was notably based on ‘confessing Christ as the life of the world and Christian resistance to the demonic powers in racism, sexism, caste

JPIC quickly caught the attention of the members of the WCC and of many other ecumenical groups and organizations. It was attractive because it summarized under its broad programme-roof major ecumenical social and ethical themes that had been on the ecumenical agenda in recent decades. A number of regional ecumenical conferences on JPIC topics were held between 1986 and 1989, and significant texts, Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Protestant, were produced (Lodberg 2004: 329–331), and this rich scientific, theological, and ethical reflection was finally integrated into the ‘Ten Affirmations’ of the World Convocation on Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation held in Seoul in 1990 (Ecumenical Movement: 317–324).

The period 1965–1990 was one of wide-ranging reflection and methodologically highly diverse approaches, of carefully worded as well as extremely sharp-edged formulations, of radical challenges, profound social and theological insights, and creative ideas that were occasionally carried away by jargon. This remarkable stream of social-ethical reflection, enquiry, and vision has by no means yet been sufficiently researched.

**Mission and Evangelism**

The integration of the vigorous International Missionary Council (IMC), founded in 1921, with the WCC at the 1961 WCC Assembly in New Delhi exposed the new Division (from 1971, Commission) on World Mission and Evangelism (D/CWME) to a much broader and more diverse constituency than the specialized constituency of the former IMC. This explains, in part, why the mission-related activities of the WCC were much more heavily rocked by debates and controversies than other sections of the Council. The story (see Larsson and Castro 2004; Conway 2004: 440–444; Dictionary: 786–789) began with the World Mission Conference at Mexico City in 1963, the first one organized by the new DWME. It announced a holistic mission concept, ‘mission in six continents’, that is mission no longer conceived as a North–South movement of professionals sent by missions (plural), but mission (singular) as participation in God’s mission in all places, universally and locally.

This initially more geographically orientated concept of mission was expanded and differentiated by the next world mission conference at Bangkok in 1973, under the theme ‘Salvation Today’, to an all-encompassing vision of mission as the task of the whole church proclaiming the whole gospel to the whole person in the whole world. The idea of a ‘moratorium’, a partial reduction of western missionary personnel and funds in order to overcome the dependency of churches in the South (Larsson and Castro 2004: 126–127; also Ecumenical Movement: 364), was hotly discussed. This proposal, made by liberal and well-funded mission administrators and missiologists, had only limited effect because many regarded it as unrealistic. An important positive impact, however, of the post-Bangkok debates was the concept of ‘partnership’ whereby some mission
agencies (e.g. in France, England, and Germany) changed their governing boards to include representatives of their overseas partners.

The next two CWME-organized world mission conferences continued the complex line established by Bangkok of being theologically highly creative and ecumenically deeply divisive. Melbourne in 1980 was inspired by the Latin American Catholic bishops’ ingenious formulation, already seen, of God’s ‘preferential option for the poor’ and even radicalized it by seeing the poor not simply as the addressees of social mission/assistance but as belonging to the essence of the gospel in the perspective of the coming reign of God. It is therefore necessary to side with the poor against political and economic systems of oppression. San Antonio in 1989 faced the already long-standing question in mission history concerning relationships with other world religions. The conference tried to avoid some of the rather more extreme recent interpretations—e.g. God and the Holy Spirit being active in other religions—by agreeing on a compromise: (1) We cannot point to any other way of salvation than Jesus Christ. (2) At the same time we cannot put any limit to God’s saving power. (3) There is a tension between these affirmations which we acknowledge and cannot resolve (Dictionary: 788). Many critics would have preferred a clearer confession of the unique saving authority of Jesus Christ, but San Antonio was concerned to formulate a holistic understanding of mission by holding together ‘spiritual and material needs, prayer and action, evangelism and social responsibility, dialogue and witness, power and vulnerability, local and universal’ (Kinnamon 2004: 60).

Two developments further extended inherited concepts of mission. First, the Christian Medical Commission (CMC) was created by the DWME in 1968, with an emphasis on the church as a healing and caring community. Second, the Urban Rural Mission (URM), established by the CWME in 1978, sought to respond to the situation of the poor and marginalized in rural communities and in new rapidly growing industrialized regions. URM groups played a pioneering role in community organizing and empowerment, and they often moved beyond recognizable Christian positions, thereby reinforcing criticism of WCC mission activities.

Criticism of the 1973 Bangkok conference and of the CWME in general for holding an ideologically permeated emphasis on social mission led to the emergence of a new, alternative mission movement. The International Congress on World Evangelization met at Lausanne in 1974. About 60 per cent of the nearly 2,500 participants came from member churches of the WCC. They formulated the ‘Lausanne Covenant’ (Ecumenical Movement: 358–363), with a stress on evangelization as the proclamation of the biblical, historical Christ as Saviour and Lord. However, para. 6 of the Covenant also called for ‘the whole church to take the whole Gospel to the whole world’ (Ecumenical Movement: 360)—rather like the approach of Bangkok.

Even before the next congress of the Lausanne Movement at Pattaya, Thailand, in 1980, attempts were made to indicate convergences between Bangkok 1973, the Lausanne Covenant, and the 1975 apostolic exhortation of Pope Paul VI, Evangelii Nuntiandi (Pope Paul VI 1975), for example with regard to their common affirmation that the gospel addresses both the spiritual and material dimensions of life (Kinnamon 2004: 61–62;
Intense Activity: 1965–1990

Larsson and Castro 2004: 139). In 1976, the Lausanne Movement adopted a more permanent structure, the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization.

The major 1982 CWME statement, ‘Mission and Evangelism: An Ecumenical Affirmation’ (Ecumenical Movement: 372–383), bridged diverse positions on mission and evangelism and sought to re-establish a balance between clear proclamation of the gospel and the critical-prophetic challenges of Bangkok and Melbourne. It was highly praised as the most important ecumenical mission statement thus far, commanding a broad assent also in evangelical circles. At the end of our period, the 1990 encyclical letter of Pope John Paul II, Redemptoris Missio (Pope John Paul II 1990, nn. 28–29, 55), contained views that were similar to those of San Antonio—and those expressed earlier by Vatican II (Second Vatican Council 1964, n. 16)—regarding people of other religions and their chances of salvation.

Theological Developments

The theological centre of the ecumenical movement from the start has been the Faith and Order movement, which became a commission of the newly formed WCC in 1948. In our period, seven major conferences of the Commission on Faith and Order, each with about 200 participants, together with the annual meetings of the Faith and Order Standing Commission and over a hundred sessions of study commissions and drafting groups enriched the ecumenical movement with a remarkable series of insights and initiatives. All of this is expressed in many texts, reports, statements, and contributions to WCC assemblies, and it is absolutely necessary to keep them present in our ecumenical memory. Elements of this Faith and Order heritage are here summarized in six sections (detailed surveys and texts can be found in Gassmann 1993a and Gassmann 1993b: 15–31).

Visible Unity/Communion of the Church

In 1964, Faith and Order began studies on the nature of unity and on ecumenical councils and conciliarity that influenced the Uppsala Assembly’s desire for ‘a truly universal, ecumenical, conciliar form of common life and witness’ and its vision of a ‘genuinely universal council’ (Goodall 1968: 17). The following Assembly in 1975 at Nairobi received a Faith and Order text (from Salamanca 1973) that envisaged a ‘conciliar fellowship of local churches’ united in faith, sacraments, confession, and communion (Paton 1976: 60). In 1978 at Bangalore the Commission agreed on three fundamental requirements for visible unity: common understanding of the apostolic faith; mutual recognition of baptism, eucharist, and ministry; and agreement on common ways of teaching and decision-making (Gassmann 1993a: 21). Faith and Order finally prepared probably the most important statement so far regarding unity for the Canberra Assembly of the WCC.
in 1991 on the theme ‘The Unity of the Church as Koinonia: Gift and Calling’ (Kinnamon 1991: 172–174). The emphasis was on koinonia/communion—instead of unity—within the comprehensive context of God's saving purpose for humanity and creation.

**Essential Elements of Communion: Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry**

This trio has been a regular part of Faith and Order discussions since the 1920s. Preliminary results of many meetings on the three issues were integrated at the 1974 Faith and Order meeting in Accra into the document ‘One Baptism, One Eucharist and a Mutually Recognized Ministry’ (Gassmann 1993a: 24), which received considerable attention from the churches. Further revisions and clarifications and finally the discussion at the Commission meeting in 1982 at Lima, with simultaneous revisions by a steering group during the concluding sessions, produced a little ecumenical miracle: the famous ‘BEM’ text on Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (Faith and Order 1982). The text indicates agreements and convergences and gives suggestions for further work, and it was translated into more than thirty-five languages, printed in nearly half a million copies, and discussed in hundreds of groups. More than 180 churches, including the Roman Catholic Church, officially responded to it, and many parts of it, though not all, found general approval. The most widely distributed and discussed ecumenical text thus far, BEM has become an important reference point and is much appreciated as a result of serious theological effort.

**Confessing the One Faith**

There has always been a recognition that the fundamental convictions of the Christian faith have been preserved and confessed by most Christian churches. This presupposition was taken up by Faith and Order in a series of studies on specific aspects of the Christian faith (e.g. ‘Creation, New Creation and the Unity of the Church’, 1964; see Handspicker 1986, 153) and in studies and group work leading to the important and widely acclaimed 1978 statement, ‘A Common Account of Hope’ (Gassmann 1993a: 30). In 1978 at Bangalore the Commission highlighted the ‘common understanding of the apostolic faith’ as the first requirement of visible unity and initiated a study process in the course of which the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed of 381 and its ecumenical significance received increased attention. In 1982, the Commission launched at Lima the study project, ‘Towards the Common Expression of the Apostolic Faith Today’, and in 1990 a study document was approved for discussion in the churches: **Confessing the One Faith: An Ecumenical Explication of the Apostolic Faith as it is Confessed in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (381)** (Faith and Order 1991; see Gassman 1993a: 30–33).
The Relation between Unity and Renewal in the Church

Tired of the repetitive debate regarding whether common social witness and action or theological dialogue and agreement is more important for the ecumenical movement, Faith and Order has sought to underline the unity of diverse ecumenical efforts. Encouraged by the 1968 Uppsala Assembly, a study programme on ‘The Unity of the Church and the Unity of Mankind’ was pursued from 1969. The study provoked quite serious differences of opinion (e.g. on the ‘unity of mankind’), and only a provisional report, ‘Towards Unity in Tension’, was accepted in 1974 at Accra (Gassmann 1993a: 25–27).

A new start was made in 1982, again at Lima, when a study on ‘The Unity of the Church and the Renewal [avoiding the ambiguous “unity”] of Human Community’ was authorized as a major project. Consultations between 1984 and 1989 reflected on the interrelation of Church and humanity, developed the concept of the Church as ‘mystery’ and ‘prophetic sign’, and considered the ecclesiological implications of the churches’ engagement for justice and for the community of women and men in church and society. A study document was approved in 1990, Church and World: The Unity of the Church and the Renewal of Human Community (Faith and Order 1990), which stimulated considerable interest because of its theological bridge-building between ecclesiology and social ethics.

Community of Women and Men

At the first World Conference on Faith and Order at Lausanne in 1927 the women delegates asked the conference ‘to realise the significance of the fact that out of nearly 400 delegates only seven are women… [W]e believe that the right place of women in the Church and in the councils of the Church is [a subject] of grave moment’ (Bate 1927: 372–373). Since then much has changed and pressure for a greater presence and responsibility of women in the churches has increased. This found expression at the 1974 WCC consultation on ‘Sexism in the 1970s: Discrimination against Women’, and in response a study was undertaken from 1978–1981, under the joint responsibility of Faith and Order and the WCC subunit on Women in Church and Society, on ‘The Community of Women and Men in the Church’ (Raiser 2004: 244–250; Gassmann 1993a: 27).

The study represented a new stage in the ecumenical debate on the place of women because of its broader scope (women and men), constructive focus (community), and its participatory and ecclesiological framework, and it prompted enormous interest. To evaluate its impact and results a WCC conference on ‘The Community of Women and Men in the Church’ was organized in 1981 at Sheffield. The impulses from Sheffield led to even stronger sensitivity in favour of improving the place and co-responsibility of women in ecclesial life. An ecumenical ‘Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women’ was launched in 1988 and found a lively echo in many local activities and programmes. Another consequence of Sheffield was the 1981 decision of the WCC Central Committee
to set up a quota system for the representation of women at all WCC events. Since then the issue of quotas has occupied all ecumenical and confessional organizations and many churches (Raiser 2004: 256–258).

A further implication of the ecumenical debate on women in church and society was the question of the ordination of women. Calls for the ordination of women met with opposition especially—but not only—from the Orthodox churches and from the RCC (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith 1976). There were efforts to discuss the issue in a broader biblical, historical, and theological framework, e.g. at the remarkable 1988 Orthodox consultation on the island of Rhodes on ‘The Place of Women in the Orthodox Church and the Question of the Ordination of Women’, which explored ways to achieve a fuller participation of women and touched on the ministry of deaconesses as a possible step forward. The debates have generally helped to improve the place and role of women in many churches (Raiser 2004: 251–253).

A New and Important Ecumenical Method:
Bilateral Dialogues

The 1960s saw the start of bilateral theological dialogues sponsored by Christian world communions or by individual churches. These dialogues have developed into a major expression and instrument of ecumenical theological endeavour in terms of the number of participants involved, the number of commissions and meetings, and also the available finance—far exceeding that available for other ecumenical theological work. In our period, a number of dialogues achieved substantial agreement on formerly divisive issues, demonstrating their great ecumenical significance (see GA and GA II).

Specific ecumenical concerns such as the theological struggle towards manifesting full communion between churches require specific institutional ‘carriers’, without which they would be in danger of being obscured or lost in the ups and downs of ecumenical history. In the period 1965–1990 Faith and Order and, increasingly, the various bilateral dialogues served as such carriers—important theological instruments of the ecumenical movement.

References


Suggested Reading

History 3
CHAPTER 5

CONSOLIDATION AND CHALLENGE: 1990—PRESENT

THOMAS F. BEST

‘Winter under cultivation is as arable as Spring’

Emily Dickinson

INTRODUCTION

Christians are one in Christ through their common baptism into Christ and into Christ’s one body, the church, in its diverse forms. The ecumenical movement strives to make that unity more visible and effective in the churches’ own lives, and in their common witness and service to the world.

By 1990 the ecumenical movement had already left an impressive legacy. A remarkable 180 official church responses to the 1982 World Council of Churches (WCC) Faith and Order convergence text Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (BEM; Faith and Order Commission 2007) had been received; in South Africa, negotiations between the government and the African National Congress (ANC) continued, validating the ecumenical movement’s costly struggle against apartheid; Eastern and Oriental Orthodox

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churches were nearing reconciliation after 1,500 years’ separation; major conferences had been held in 1989 on Mission in San Antonio, and on Peace with Justice in Basel; major conferences on diakonia had been held in Larnaca in 1986 and El Escorial in 1987; the Ecumenical Decade of the Churches in Solidarity with Women had been launched in 1988; significant bilateral discussions continued apace; and major church unions had been consummated, with no fewer than ten active union discussions in process. Ecumenical expectations were high, and justly so.

There were also challenges. The churches had expanded their common understanding of the apostolic faith, and moved towards mutual recognition of baptism, Eucharist, and ministry; but they remained far from agreement on the crucial issue of common ways of teaching and decision-making. In Eastern Europe, the Orthodox faced the challenge of promoting faith and mission in nations which had endured seventy years of official atheist ideology, of having church property restored, and of balancing their historic ecumenical engagement with a resurgent—and often anti-ecumenical—nationalism.

The fall of the apartheid regime in South Africa had brought a moral victory for the ecumenical movement, but at a heavy cost in financial support. The end of dictatorships in Eastern Europe and Latin America left lingering questions: had the ecumenical movement, in supporting its member churches, distanced itself sufficiently from oppressive regimes? And above all: were we entering an ‘ecumenical winter’ driven by disappointed hopes for the sharing of the Lord’s Supper between Protestants and Roman Catholics?

**Conciliar and Multilateral Ecumenism**

The BEM response process identified the issue of ecclesiology as central; since 1990 the notion of koinonia (communion) has been central to the ecumenical discussion of ecclesiology. Coming from the New Testament, the term indicates both the believer’s individual relationship to Christ and the churches’ relationships with one another, both spiritually and practically. Its classic expression comes from the WCC’s Seventh Assembly in Canberra in 1991 and the Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order held in Santiago de Compostela in 1993:

The unity of the Church to which we are called is a koinonia given and expressed in the common confession of the apostolic faith; a common sacramental life entered by the one baptism and celebrated together in one eucharistic fellowship; a common life in which members and ministries are mutually recognized and reconciled; and a common mission witnessing to all people to the gospel of God’s grace and serving the whole of creation. The goal of the search for full communion is realized when all the churches are able to recognize in one another the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church in its fullness. This full communion will be expressed on the local and the universal levels through conciliar forms of life and action. In such communion...