

# CENTRO PRO UNIONE

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*A Center conducted by the Franciscan Friars of the Atonement*

# Director's Desk

We are pleased to present the texts of three public lectures given at the **Centro Pro Unione** in this Fall issue of the *Bulletin*.

As General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, Dr. Konrad Raiser made his first official visit to Rome with a delegation representing the Council's side of the Joint Working Group between the Roman Catholic Church and the WCC. His lecture emphasized the progress made in increased collaboration but also expressed a desire to see a reorganization for furthering relations and strengthening the relationships between the WCC and the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity.

During the Spring term, Dr. Geoffrey Wainwright, visiting professor at the Pontifical Gregorian University and long time friend of the **Centro**, offered his reflections on the understanding of apostolic tradition. His lecture presented the Methodist understanding of apostolic tradition in relation to itself and to others and concluded with an ecumenical perspective on the question of apostolic tradition.

The third text which we offer to our readers deals with the ecumenical questions related to the themes of justice, peace and the integrity of creation. The Italian text represents one of the classes held during our recent Italian course of introduction to the ecumenical movement. Dr. Alberto Quattrucci is a member of the St. Egidio community in Rome.

Our Summer course had 27 participants from North America, England, Belgium, Indonesia and Africa. We are pleased to be able to offer the three week course, "*Introduction to the Ecumenical & Interreligious Movements from a Roman Catholic Perspective*" this Summer from 24 June to 12 July 1996. For our readers' convenience an informational flyer and application form is included. We hope you will share this information with others. Additional flyers can be obtained by contacting us at the **Centro**.

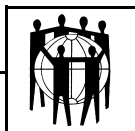
You will find another informational flyer enclosed for the ecumenical program of studies at the Pontifical University of St. Thomas-Angelicum. The **Centro** library has played an important role in this program. A number of the Friars have also taught in the ecumenical section of the theological faculty.

The **Centro's** activities for this Fall began with a concert of classical music by the International Academy "A. Corelli". In November we will co-sponsor a lecture with the Lay Centre at Foyer Unitas given by Rev. Thomas Stransky, CSP, rector of the Tantur Ecumenical Institute entitled "The Crisis of Religion in the Holy Land". On November 23rd and 24th, we have organized with the Anglican Centre in Rome and the International Bridgettine Center in Farfa a symposium on the theme "Apostolic Continuity of the Church and Apostolic Succession". Speakers will include Mary Tanner, Ola Tjørhom, Gerald O'Collins, SJ, Metropolitan John (Zizioulas) of Pergamon, Harding Meyer and William Henn, OFM Cap.

We warmly welcome the new Director of the Anglican Centre, Rev. Bruce Ruddock and the new Administrator, Mrs. Vivien Ruddock. Best wishes to the former Director, Rev. Douglas Brown, SSM, who serves as chaplain to the Anglican Community in Palermo.

I would like to end with a word of "Thanks". During the summer our librarian, Mary Peter Froelicher, SHCJ visited the WCC Ecumenical Centre in Geneva seeking to complete some series of periodicals and monographs. Her trip was very successful thanks to the generosity of so many, Pierre Beffa, Director of the Library, staffs of the various Units of the WCC, the Publications Office, the Bookstore, the Lutheran World Federation, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, and the Conference of European Churches. It is with their aid that our library grows in quality and richness of documentation.

James F. Puglisi, SA  
Director





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Centro Conferences

## Thirty Years in the Service of the Ecumenical Movement The Joint Working Group between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches

by

Dr. Konrad Raiser

Secretary General of the World Council of Churches, Geneva

(Conference given at the **Centro Pro Unione**, Tuesday, 4 April 1995)

The Joint Working Group (JWG) between the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) and the World Council of Churches has been at work for thirty years. The Group was constituted in 1965, before the closing of the Second Vatican Council, to explore the possibilities of common study and to propose methods and structures of collaboration between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches (WCC).

This thirtieth anniversary offers us an occasion to express our gratitude to those who planted the seeds at a small meeting in Milan (1964), where it was agreed that such a step was desirable<sup>1</sup>, to those who, soon later, laid the foundations at the meeting of the WCC Central Committee in Enugu (1965)<sup>2</sup>, and to those who laboured for the agreement by the Vatican “to set up a mixed committee... to explore together the possibilities of dialogue and collaboration between the WCC and the RCC”<sup>3</sup>.

Now, thirty years later, we continue this dialogue and collaboration while attempting a survey and interpretation of the work the JWG accomplished. Of course, it is difficult to summarize three decades of work—a succession of achievements and failures—in the framework of a short presentation. I will not make long references, for example, to the cooperation within Evangelism, the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. This does not mean I minimize their importance. I consider this aspect of RCC-WCC cooperation as better known.

The task of presenting the work of the JWG appears to be even more difficult when realizing that many questions are raised: what was the real contribution of the JWG to the ecumenical movement in its thirty years of existence? what is the role and the specificity of the JWG today? is it time for a systematic evaluation

of what the JWG has achieved? is it time for reviewing its mandate and basic tasks?

Some of these and many other questions are somehow justified by the variety of understandings of or expectations from the JWG. The true significance of the JWG “is only seen when it is understood as one element in the manifold and diverse—official and unofficial—movement at every level”, commented one of those who served the JWG in the first years of its existence<sup>4</sup>. “The Joint Working Group represents a turning point in the history of the ecumenical movement”, concluded some years ago a thesis presented to the Fribourg University<sup>5</sup>. “The Joint Working Group has been renewed at regular intervals, becoming a substitute for Catholic membership in the WCC, quite against the intention of most of its creators”, observed a “friendly outsider” in an extensive study which grew out of a paper he was asked to present to one of the JWG meetings<sup>6</sup>.

Where do we stand today? What our expectations are from the JWG within the present ecumenical situation? how does the work of the JWG influence and shape our ecumenical vision?

We should probably underline from the very beginning that three important factors have to be taken seriously into consideration when studying the history of the JWG: first, the JWG, as a joint instrument of the RCC and the WCC, is influenced by developments and changes which take place within its parent bodies. Second the ecumenical situation and, in the broader context of this situation, the relationship between the RCC and the WCC are subject to changes and, therefore, it is important to always recall the significant events at each period in order to

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Visser t' Hooft, *Memoirs*, London: SCM Press, 1973, p. 331.

<sup>2</sup> The text of the proposal which had been adopted by the WCC Central Committee in Enugu is published in *The Ecumenical Review* 18 (2), 1966, pp. 171ff.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. A. Bea, M. Boegner, W.A. Visser t' Hooft, N.A. Nissiotis, O. Cullmann, *Rencontre œcuménique à Genève*, Geneva: Labor et Fides (“Collection œcuménique”, 4), 1965.

<sup>4</sup> Lukas Vischer, “The activities of the JWG between the RCC and the WCC, 1965-1969”, *The Ecumenical Review* 22 (1), 1970, p. 46.

<sup>5</sup> Catherine E. Clifford, *The Joint Working Group between the World Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Church: Historical and Ecclesiological Perspectives*, Fribourg, 1987, p. 132.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas Sieger Derr, *Barriers to Ecumenism, The Holy See and the World Council on Social Questions*, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1983, p. 3.

reestablish the continuity in the development of the JWG. Third, the reaffirmation by the JWG of earlier convictions, far from being a purely formal or diplomatic act, reflects an important consolidation in the understanding of the nature and collaboration between the RCC and the WCC.

### **Initial years of the JWG: 'The principles of dialogue'**

The initial years of the existence of the JWG coincided with the pioneering period of ecumenical initiatives following the Second Vatican Council. The JWG participated fully in the excitement of those years and contributed to the dynamics of the Council. During a brief exploratory period of only three years, the JWG was able to fulfil its initial mandate of clarifying the principles and methods of collaboration. The first question, and indeed a fundamental one, confronting the JWG was that of the very nature of ecumenism. The active entry into the ecumenical movement of the Roman Catholic Church, together with the increased involvement of the orthodox churches in ecumenical work, required a new common language as well as a review of basic approaches. Was it possible to speak of one and the same conception of the ecumenical movement?

The first two official reports of the JWG, submitted in 1966<sup>7</sup> and 1967<sup>8</sup>, reflect a broad agreement about the nature of the ecumenical movement in which both the RCC and the WCC share. The second official report made it clear that both the WCC and the RCC were, in their own way, anxious to serve the *one ecumenical movement* and that for the sake of this common aim there was "*need for constantly more dynamic relations between them*".

This common understanding was further developed in a study document on the nature of ecumenical dialogue<sup>9</sup>. It had become urgent to launch a "dialogue about dialogue" and to initiate a common understanding of principles and methods. The word "dialogue" had become one of the most favoured expressions after the Second Vatican Council. Dialogue and ecumenical movement become practically interchangeable notions. The JWG stated that dialogue does not mean simply conversation. The Churches meet together and cooperate with each other for the sake of the task jointly entrusted to them. The dialogue is not just an internal Church affair. It arises from the desire to be more obedient to Christ, and its aim is common witness. The whole issue of bilateral theological dialogues and their relationship to the multilateral one was also deepened by the JWG. Most of the affirmations contained in this study document are still valid today, constituting basic elements of the ecumenical commitment on both sides.

In addition to this theological work, the JWG was able to initiate a wide network of links between departments of the WCC

<sup>7</sup> Cf. *The Ecumenical Review* 18 (2), 1966, pp. 243ff.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. *The Ecumenical Review* 19 (4), 1967, pp. 461ff.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. *The Ecumenical Review* 19 (4), 1967, pp. 469ff.

on the one side and the corresponding partners in the RCC on the other. The area of cooperation expanded in many directions: from theological conversations to development aid and from cooperation among women's organizations to combined efforts to fix a common date for Easter.

This initial period appears today, at least for the WCC, of extreme importance. The Theological work accomplished by the JWG during the first years of its existence strengthened the awareness that the WCC is not to be identified with the ecumenical movement and that this movement extends further than the WCC. This awareness determines even today our ecumenical vision and our efforts. Within the present ecumenical situation, it forces us to turn to a great variety of ecumenical partners, to churches which have their own ecumenical vision and commitment without being necessarily member-churches of the WCC—to mention here only the evangelical and pentecostal ecclesial realities. Moreover, building, maintaining and cultivating relationship with a non member church has been a precious experience which facilitate our efforts today in cooperating with other churches and ecumenical organisations. Finally, the ecclesiological deliberations during which our Roman Catholic partners reminded to the WCC that to explore, understand and describe the fellowship experienced within the WCC we have to emphasize the notion of the "Churches" rather than that of the "Council"<sup>10</sup>. This brings us to the very heart of our present task to respond to a slightly rephrased question: is the fellowship that has grown between the churches in the ecumenical movement ecclesial in nature and how can it be described?

### **A search for reorganization: towards a new realism?**

Encouraged by the positive experiences during the exploratory period and by the affirmative responses from the two parent bodies, the JWG extended its reflections beyond the principles of collaboration to a number of basic issues regarding the relationship between the RCC and the fellowship of churches within the WCC. Two study commissions were formed on "Catholicity and Apostolicity" and on "Common Witness and Proselytism", the results of which were published together with the third official report in 1971<sup>11</sup>.

Moreover, the JWG had decided in 1969 to explore in detail the question of possible membership of the RCC in WCC. Since 1966 this question had been frequently discussed at various meetings, including the Uppsala Assembly in 1968. The publication of the report on this study, "Patterns of Relationships between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches", in 1972 concludes this second phase of the activities

<sup>10</sup> "*The emphasis... should not be on the Council of Churches, but on the Council of Churches*", cf. Thomas F. Stransky, "Roman Catholic - World Council of Churches Relations, Address given to the US Conference of the WCC at Buck Hills Falls, Pa., April 30, 1970", WCC Archives.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. *The Ecumenical Review* 23 (1), 1971, pp. 9-20, 44ff.

of the JWG<sup>12</sup>.

The third report concludes on a hopeful note. It refers only briefly to the study on membership. When the results of this study were published a year later, a preface, signed by Cardinal Willebrands as President of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity (SPCU) and Dr. Eugene Carson Blake as General Secretary of the WCC stated that an application by the RCC for membership in the WCC was not to be expected “*in the near future*”, adding that “*all are convinced that cooperation between these bodies must not only continue, it must be intensified*”. This reserved response to the study, coupled with a number of other events, inaugurated a period of critical assessment and reorientation in the work of the JWG leading up to the fourth official report which was presented at the time of the Nairobi Assembly of the WCC (1975)<sup>13</sup>.

The judgement on the membership question, “not in the immediate future”, reconfirmed also in the fifth report of the JWG, reflected a clear policy choice on the highest level within the RCC, and it had implications for the relationship in general. It meant, in fact, that no further structural and institutionalized links between the two bodies would be developed, and even existing ones came under critical scrutiny. Within the total scope of ecumenical relationships established by the RCC following the Second Vatican Council, priority attention gradually shifted from relationships with the WCC to bilateral conversations with the major Christian World Communion. Most of these conversations at the time of the study on membership had completed the exploratory phase and were moving into an official doctrinal dialogue.

The consequences of this choice became immediately visible in three distinct areas of collaboration which had been particularly notable examples of collaboration of the growth of joint initiatives: the Christian Medical Commission, the Women's Ecumenical Liaison Group, and the Joint Committee on Society Development and Peace (SODEPAX). The case of SODEPAX offers the clearest example of the problem encountered by the JWG and its parent bodies in this period. Formed in 1968 as a result of a joint conference on issues of development, SODEPAX explored fully the possibilities of its experimental mandate as a joint operation with a competent staff team assisted by generous independent funding. In the beginning it had been the hope that SODEPAX would serve as the catalyst for a process of growing organic relationships between its parent bodies— in this case, the Pontifical Commission Justice and Peace (PCJP) and the WCC. When it became clear that neither side was yet ready for such a move, SODEPAX found itself caught in the dilemma of either being regarded as an irritating “third entity” or becoming an overstructured instrument for liaison between separate activities of its parent bodies. The dilemma was resolved initially in 1972

by drastically reducing the operations and finally in 1980 by terminating the mandate of SODEPAX altogether.

As one could expect it, the coincidence of these decisions led to a temporary “crisis of confidence” in the JWG and prompted a process of reorientation in its work. While efforts until this time had been focused on the task of expanding and organizing collaboration between the structures of the two parent bodies at the international level, during the years up to 1975 the JWG turned its attention to the issue of local ecumenism.

A first step had already been taken by initiating a survey of Roman Catholic participation in councils of churches, which served as a contribution to a WCC-sponsored World Consultation on Christian Councils in 1971<sup>14</sup>. At the same time, the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity had begun a study of the forms of ecumenical collaboration on Various levels. The result of the survey and the ensuing discussion in the JWG provided important input for the document on “Ecumenical Collaboration at the Regional, National and Local Levels”, published by the SPCU in 1975<sup>15</sup>.

Twenty years later, we realize the importance of these efforts and the pioneering role of the JWG. Increasingly, the RCC, is a member of a council of churches at local, national or regional level, these are considered among the most important forms of ecumenical cooperation. The substance of the 1975 document has become integral part of the *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*, published by the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (PCPCU). New challenges emerge, being addressed to both sides. On the one hand, the question of a National Council of Churches, of which the RCC is a member, seeking associate membership in the WCC is a delicate matter requiring decision by the member churches, including the RCC. On the other hand, the new reality of institutional local ecumenism constrains the WCC to reassess the significance and role of its partners within the one ecumenical movement and look for ways of effective cooperation with them. Finally, both sides are called to seriously consider the implications of the present ecumenical work at the local, national or regional levels, reflecting often two different models of ecumenism. As a member of the WCC put it in Johannesburg (1994):

*“The most dividing elements often arise from within constituencies and not through the vision imposed from outside. To whom should we listen within the churches? How do we keep people at a table and deal with different understandings of our faith? On the issue of war, the leadership is fairly unified in contrast to many in their constituency, but on the subject of sexuality for example they are deeply divided. How can we stay together through conversations where some feel so offended by others’*

<sup>12</sup> *The Ecumenical Review* 24 (3), 1972, pp. 247ff.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. D.M. Paton (ed.), *Breaking Barriers, Nairobi 1975*, London: SPCK, 1976, pp. 271ff.

<sup>14</sup> Published in a dossier together with other relevant papers in *One in Christ* 8 (2), 1972, pp. 200ff.

<sup>15</sup> *Information Service* n. 26 (I), 1975, pp. 8f.

*decisions that they cannot endure it any longer?*"<sup>16</sup>.

A second challenge coming from this period and still keeping its stimulating richness is the study on local ecumenism and the mission of the church. In carrying out this study, the JWG had adopted the method of surveying a limited number of specific situations. On the basis of the responses from correspondents in twenty countries, as well as from three offices in the Roman Curia, a report was prepared and submitted to the JWG in 1974<sup>17</sup>. The study attempted the identification of characteristic elements in the ecumenical situation, the influence of contextual factors on the development of specific forms of cooperation, and the widening of ecumenical awareness from ecumenism as an interconfessional activity to ecumenism as a dimension of Christian life, from ecumenism as an interchurch concern to ecumenism as service in the world, and from merely doing things together to witnessing together. All these are still valid methodological components and challenging elements in our common journey. Even more importantly, the document made the attempt to analyze the underlying difficulties "*which impede the churches' progress towards unity*". It is not only the difficulties mentioned and deepened in the study which offer interesting insights but the constant reminder of the principle that such an analysis is needed in every context and every particular period.

#### **"A framework of ongoing efforts": slowing down of the progress?"**

The demand which had been identified through the study on local ecumenism oriented the JWG towards two studies on *Towards a Confession of the Common Faith*<sup>18</sup> and on *Common Witness*<sup>19</sup>. Both studies continue earlier reflections in the JWG on the goal of visible unity and on the task of common witness. They have received wide publicity and stimulated ecumenical collaboration in many situations.

Since 1978-79, the attention of the JWG has shifted to the issues of collaboration in the field of social thought and action. Rather than entrusting the task of this renewed exploration to a special body or study group, the JWG concentrated on a fuller discussion of the three areas which had been identified for study: the differences in self-understanding and mode of operation of the two partners as they act in the social field; the areas of convergence and of divergence in the social thinking of both sides; and the joint reflection of the theological and ecclesiological basis of churches' social action. The papers presented to the JWG on this occasion have been made public together with a first

summary of the discussion in the JWG<sup>20</sup>.

In 1979 the JWG had been confident in proposing to its parent bodies three subjects for concrete and visible collaboration which it felt could be taken up immediately since they represented equally pressing concerns for both sides. In particular, the JWG had suggested joint initiatives regarding the International Year of Disabled Persons, human rights and religious liberty, and the armaments issue. A year later it had become clear that SODEPAX would not continue beyond the end of 1980 and no new instrumentality had yet been developed. Thus the three suggestions remained without immediate follow-up.

Another interim structure, the "Joint Consultative Group on Social Thought and Action" focused first on development, peace and human right and later turned its attention to the issues of racism and apartheid (1985-1987). With the agreement of its parent bodies, its mandate ended in 1988. One small but visible result of these efforts has been a volume containing official RCC and WCC statements on peace and disarmament, published jointly by the Vatican's Pontifical Commission Justice and Peace and the WCC Commission of the Churches in International Affairs (CCIA)<sup>21</sup>.

Of course, the fifth report, like those which preceded it, included a section on "ongoing collaboration" which identified some of the areas where regular and sustained common work had taken shape over the years. One may observe that this cooperation has found a long-term structural expression in some areas, notably in the work of the Commissions on Faith and Order and on World Mission and Evangelism, as well as in the preparation of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Specific constitutional provisions in the by laws of these two commission permitted the full and official participation of bodies outside the formal membership of the WCC. This form of collaboration has been maintained and even expanded in spite of the obstacles and problems encountered in other areas. It is true that the achievement of the Commission on Faith and Order in presenting the ecumenical converge texts on "Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry" would have been unthinkable without the full participation of competent Roman Catholic officials. Collaboration has also been intensive in the area of mission and evangelism. Among other examples one could quote documents on the theme of the World Missionary Conference at Melbourne (1980), reactions from RC missiologists to the draft of the ecumenical affirmation on mission and evangelism, and a special study paper in preparation for the Sixth Assembly of the WCC coming from a consultation sponsored by the SPCU in 1982.

Other areas where contacts have been firmly established and found some regular expression include inter-religious dialogue, activities in the field of science and technology and the programme of the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey. It will be

<sup>16</sup> Cf. WCC Central Committee, *Minutes of the Forty-Fifth Meeting, Johannesburg, South Africa, 20-28 January 1994*, Geneva: WCC, 1994, pp. 29-30.

<sup>17</sup> *One in Christ* 11 (1), 1975, pp. 30ff.

<sup>18</sup> Geneva: WCC (Coll. "Faith and Order Paper", 100), 1980.

<sup>19</sup> Geneva: WCC (Coll. "Commission on World Mission and Evangelism", 1), 1981.

<sup>20</sup> *Mid-Stream* 20 (1), 1981.

<sup>21</sup> *Peace and Disarmament: Documents of the WCC and the RCC. Presented by the CCIA and the PCJP, 1982*, Geneva: CCIA, 1982.

noted, however, particularly in comparing the fifth report with the preceding ones, that this ongoing collaboration had now taken shape most clearly in areas of study and reflection. It has been more difficult to establish or maintain forms of cooperation in those areas where the programmes of the WCC are oriented towards action, i.e. where the WCC relates directly to particular local constituencies and responds to stated needs of its member churches. The special role of the dicasteries of the Roman Curia in relationship to local church situations, the evolving status of episcopal conferences and the structures of authorities within the RCC have made it more difficult to develop forms of collaboration which go beyond contacts of staff level.

Thus, the experiences from this period constitute another source of inspiration for our present work. They seem to suggest that today we should emphasize the quality and the content of cooperation avoiding the search of structural forms for our relationships and collaboration. Yet, our difficulties in facing together the issues of human rights and religious freedom place us in a very delicate position. In many parts of our world these are the real issues Churches and people face in their daily lives. They are sources of human suffering but also of tensions between communities, including churches. Our impossibility to offer a common witness, also in these fields, could be easily characterised as a serious weakness —not to say a lack of credibility— in our respective ecumenical commitment.

#### **Furthering relations and practical cooperation**

The sixth official report, published soon before and submitted to the Canberra Assembly<sup>22</sup>, confirmed the fact that while the overall scope of collaboration between the RCC and the WCC was oriented more toward study rather than common action, the JWG began to assume the task of coordinating existing forms of collaboration or of evaluating relationships between the two bodies.

Two theological studies on “The Church: Local and Universal” and the “Hierarchy of Truths”, published as an Appendix to the sixth official report, constitute the main harvest of this period. The impetus for work on these themes came during the visit of Pope John Paul II to the WCC (1984). The first study document could be seen as part of the ongoing ecclesiological search and discussion. It focuses on the ecclesiology of communion which is presented as a framework within which the study of the church local and universal takes place. The second document attempted to offer an understanding and interpretation of the intention of the Second Vatican Council in speaking of a “hierarchy of truths”. It analyzes therefore the conciliar statement and indicates some examples of “hierarchy of truths” and proposes implications for the ecumenical dialogue. Both study documents have their own significance and constitute important steps. They raise however two questions. First, that of

“reception” in the wider sense of the term. There is the growing impression that these two documents were not sufficiently made known and explored. The second, and probably more important question concerns the relationship between the work of the JWG and the ongoing WCC-RCC collaboration within the Commission on Faith and Order. What is the specificity of the JWG? Is there duplication of work between the JWG and the Commission of Faith and Order? If the JWG attempts to clarify eventual differences between WCC documents in the drafting of which the RCC was fully involved and RC documents as such, is this effort clearly communicated or understood? These are questions which need proper answers in order to consolidate the orientation and contribution of the JWG.

The disappointing result of the many efforts on both sides for ensuring a RC participation in the world convocation on “Justice Peace and the Integrity of Creation” is known. It can be interpreted in many ways. It strengthens the conviction that the fundamental question of the nature of ecumenism has to be discussed time and again, in the light of developments on both sides. The paradox of serving the “one ecumenical movement” in spite of “the difference in nature between the WCC and the RCC” should not paralyse our efforts and lead us to impasses. But it certainly constitutes an obstacle. This obstacles could and should be analyzed more thoroughly. Here is probably a priority task for the JWG, as the sixth report recognizes in its foreword and the assembly underlines in its response to the report of the JWG.

An example where the JWG has tried to respond to a new challenge was its decision to include in its agenda the whole question of “ethical issues as new sources of division”. Can we learn to respect the convictions of the others who are rooted in their traditions and commitments? Can we continue the dialogue in the face of disagreement without demanding that anyone should compromise convictions “for the sake of unity”? The process has already started and there are good signs that the JWG will be in a position to propose how some of these dividing ethical issues may best be approached *in dialogue*.

One is positively surprised to discover in the sixth report, under the title “Ecumenical collaboration in other areas between WCC and RCC partners”, an extended list of WCC activities where representatives of the RCC were present and offered their contribution. Practically all programmatic activities of the WCC are included in this register. This is a visible result of the continuous efforts undertaken by the staff on both sides serving the JWG. It confirms that cooperation goes very often beyond Rome and Geneva and includes a considerable number of experts who are ready to serve the ecumenical movement. Undoubtedly this very fact contains a great potential for the WCC and for its relationships with the RCC. The issue of how all these experiences are shared at the local level and do serve local ecumenical cooperation remains open. The JWG has not yet found an effective and convincing way to respond to this need which has been identified since the beginning of cooperation.

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<sup>22</sup> JWG Between the RCC and the WCC, *Sixth Report; Including two Study Documents, Geneva-Rome 1990*, Geneva: WCC Publications, 1990.

### A quick look at the present

The last and still ongoing period in the efforts of the JWG has started on a positive note. The publication and wide distribution of a study document on "Ecumenical Formation: Ecumenical Reflections and Suggestions" (1993)<sup>23</sup> seems to open new possibilities for further common reflection and action in the realm of theological education. The initiative to present to the members of the WCC Central Committee (1994) copies of the *Ecumenical Directory*, in order to facilitate a better understanding of the theological basis of the RCC's involvement in the ecumenical movement, constitutes another positive step in the broad spectrum of our relationships. Since then, the JWG has included in its agenda discussions on the Directory. On this basis we might be able to deal more creatively both with ecclesiological issues, such as the nature of the ecumenical movement, and pastoral ones, such as mixed marriages.

In spite of these positive signs, it should be admitted that the radical changes in central and eastern Europe created an new climate in inter-church and ecumenical relations which also affected RCC-WCC relationship. Tensions between Orthodox churches and Eastern Rite Catholic Churches came to the agenda of the WCC at the request of its member churches. Using the existing mechanisms for mutual consultation and cooperation—including the JWG—as well as our conviction that there is a complementarity between the bilateral et multilateral dialogues have largely contributed in responding to this challenge. What could be seen as a second "crisis of confidence" was avoided.

Yet, similar tensions exist in other parts of the world and similar demands are addresses to the WCC. Here also the JWG could be extremely instrumental. Its immediate reaction was to respond to the challenge of proselytism as affecting the call to common Christian witness. A study document reminding the churches of the scope and the significance of the problem is being

prepared. A step forward however seems to be needed. Part of the problem in these tensions is due to a variety of understandings and practices of religious freedom as well as a variety of models in church and state relations. Could we use thirty years of experience and cooperation through the JWG in order to serve the churches in one of their priorities?

During a meeting between the leadership of the PCPCU and the officers and staff of the WCC (November 1993) we had extremely interesting discussions about the eventual need for an evaluation of our relationships and the possibilities of strengthening this relationship within the framework of the JWG. This is also the purpose of my official visit to the Vatican. We need to sharpen our understanding of the ecumenical movement, discussing common concerns and exploring ways of deepening and expanding our cooperation in the future. After thirty years we look at this relationship with realism. We know, on both sides, that we must move forward, but we also know much better what are the points of difficulties for each of the two partners.

We are approaching the end of the second millennium. Shortly before, the WCC will hold its Eighth Assembly commemorating on this occasion the 50th anniversary since the First Assembly at Amsterdam in 1948. The challenge of a future under the threat of growing fragmentation and violence, of a de facto apartheid between rich and poor, and of a progressive degradation of the whole ecosphere is such that it should lead to an urgent reordering of the ecumenical agenda. The "jubileo" values of reconciliation and forgiveness, of repentance and *metanoia*, of restitution and reconstruction should inspire us to close the books over our past struggles and to concentrate all our energies on addressing together the life and survival issues of today and tomorrow in the light of the gospel of Christ. It is this spirit which should characterize and which could energize our ecumenical efforts towards the year 2000. The *kairos* must not be missed.

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<sup>23</sup> *The Ecumenical Review* 45 (4), 1993, pp. 490-4.





# CC

Centro Conferences

## Do Methodists (Think They) Stand in the Apostolic Tradition?

by

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Let me offer you a rapid sketch of ecclesiastical history. In the fifth century, the non-chalcedonians split from the hitherto undivided Church. Then the Byzantine East broke away in 1054. The unreformed Roman Catholics were left behind in the sixteenth century, while the continental Protestants had the misfortune of being foreigners. In the eighteenth century, even the Church of England refused the mission of John and Charles Wesley, so that finally only Methodists remained in the body of Christ.

The point of the story is, of course, to turn the tables on Orthodox or, more particularly perhaps, Roman Catholics and even Anglicans in their respective ecclesiological self-understandings. But this ironic tale is aimed also at Methodist themselves. For many Methodists do consider that the Church to which they belong began only in the 18th century with John and Charles Wesley. And in the **first** part of this lecture, I shall in fact concede that there is unfortunately good reason, historically and theologically, for them to think so.

But soon there comes a stage when, on reflection, Methodists resent the manner in which others — perhaps Anglicans and even Roman Catholics — present them as ecclesiastical upstarts, johnnies-(and-charlies)-come-lately in the history of Christianity. And then Methodists start to assert their sense of identity with the Church of the apostles. And in a **second** part of this lecture, I shall in fact claim that there is surprisingly good reason, historically and theologically, for Methodists to make that assertion.

In the **third** and final part of this lecture, I will put forward an ecumenical perspective concerning Apostolic Tradition in which it may be possible for some of the weaknesses of Methodism in the matter of origin and continuity to be compensated for, while at the same time the claims of Methodists to apostolic character are held within moderate bounds.

So far, I have spoken of Methodists in the third person, they and them. Henceforward, I will own my allegiance and speak of Methodists as we and us. And in a further recognition of the living nature of our encounter this evening, I will address

particularly Roman Catholics and will speak from within the international bilateral dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Methodist Council, in which I have participated for the past twelve years and which I have chaired on the Methodist side for the last nine.

So here we go, on the first two parts of the lecture.

In *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, the so-called “Lima text” of the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches, the section on “Ministry” distinguishes two different ways of conceiving the relationship to the apostolic Church enjoyed by later generations, and particularly as personified by their bishops. The one conception is named (with whatever justice) after Clement of Rome, the other after Ignatius of Antioch (the two models are in any case useful). The first runs thus:

*“Clement of Rome linked the mission of the bishop with the sending of Christ by the Father and the sending of the apostles by Christ (Cor. 42:44). This made the bishop a successor of the apostles, ensuring the permanence of the apostolic mission in the Church. Clement is primarily interested in the means whereby the historical continuity of Christ's presence is ensured in the Church thanks to the apostolic succession”<sup>1</sup>.*

Note that, in this first model, the relationship to the apostolic Church is conceived in terms of *historical continuity*. In a moment, I will examine the case of Methodism in that so-called “Clementine” light. Next, however, *BEM* continues with the so-called “Ignatian” model:

*“For Ignatius of Antioch (Magn. 6:1, 3:1-2; Trall. 3:1), it is Christ surrounded by the Twelve who is permanently in*

<sup>1</sup> World Council of Churches, Faith and Order Commission, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Geneva: World Council of Churches (coll. “Faith and Order Paper”, 111), 1982, M 36, commentary, p. 29. Hereafter cited *BEM* followed by § number.

*the Church in the person of the bishop surrounded by the presbyters. Ignatius regards the Christian community assembled around the bishop in the midst of presbyters and deacons as the actual manifestation in the Spirit of the apostolic community*<sup>2</sup>.

And *BEM* concludes:

*“The sign of apostolic succession thus not only points to historical continuity; it also manifests an actual spiritual reality”*<sup>3</sup>.

Note that, on the second (“Ignatian”) model, the relationship to the apostolic Church is conceived in terms of an *actual manifestation* — “actual” here being intended as the French “*actuelle*”, a “present-day” manifestation. I shall, in a while, come to examine the case of Methodism in that so-called Ignatian light.

First, however, the perspective of historical continuity.

### I. The Perspective of Historical Continuity

Here it is clear that Methodism neither has nor claims, neither claims nor has, the “apostolic succession” as that is usually understood by Roman Catholics and by many Anglicans.

John Wesley wrote to his brother Charles, in a letter of 19 August 1785:

*“The uninterrupted succession I know to be a fable, which no man ever did or can prove”*<sup>4</sup>.

Here I may enter a side remark on the context of that statement by John Wesley: Charles Wesley became increasingly unhappy with his brother's actions that were leading inexorably to a break with the Church of England. John Wesley had — in the previous year, 2 September 1784 — “set apart” Thomas Coke as “superintendent” of the Methodist work in North America (an action to which I will return) — and Charles had written a satiric verse concerning John's action:

*“So easily are Bishops made  
By man's or woman's [!] whim?  
W[esley] his hands on C[oke] hath laid,  
But who laid hands on him?”*<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> J. Telford (ed.), *The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M. Sometime Fellow of Lincoln College, Oxford*, London: Epworth Press, 1931, t. VII, p. 284.

<sup>5</sup> F. Baker (ed.), *Representative Verse of Charles Wesley*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962, pp. 367f.

Anyway, to return to John Wesley's statement of 1785: “*The uninterrupted succession I know to be a fable, which no man ever did or can prove*”.

Neither American nor British Methodism (the two principal streams in Methodist history) claims “apostolic succession”, in the common Catholic sense, for their ministries. In **America**, the “superintendents” at once were given, or took, the title of “bishop”; and from the Christmas Conference at Baltimore in 1784 the Methodist body named itself the Methodist Episcopal Church. But it is stated in the 1986 Nairobi Report of the Joint Commission between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Methodist Council, *Towards a Statement on the Church*:

*“From its inception American Methodism has been episcopal in constitution, [but] not claiming apostolic succession in the sense of the Roman Catholic Church ...”*<sup>6</sup>.

Neither in America, then, nor in **Britain**. In Britain, Methodism retained a single order or form of ministry, the presbyteral; and between 1795 and 1836 the Conference did not practice the laying on of hands in its admission of ministers “into full connexion”. Some would say that the motive was the desire not to set up a “rival” order of ministries as long as there was still hope of a reintegration with the Church of England.

Yet Roman Catholics need to be assured that there was no lack of concern for the orderly transmission of ministry on the part of John Wesley, nor in later American or British Methodism.

John Wesley himself was a student of ecclesiastical history and he had been greatly influenced by the works of two Anglican historians on the early Church: Edward Stillingfleet's *Irenicum* (1659) and Peter King's *An Enquiry into the Constitution, Discipline, Unity and Worship of the Primitive Church* (1712). These writings helped to persuade John Wesley that bishops and presbyters were “essentially of the same order”. The difference between them resided in the *wider jurisdiction* exercised by the episcopate. This position can find support in St. Jerome, and it has not been without its respectable defenders among later Roman Catholic theologians.

It was doubtless because of his *de facto* authority among the Methodists that Wesley could consider himself “as much a scriptural episcopos as any man in Europe” (his phrase!). And he judged that the emergency situation of pastoral need in North America (after the War of Independence) warranted his exercising the sacramental power of ordination which had hitherto been held in check only by limits of jurisdiction; and the jurisdiction of the Church of England was now at an end in the newly independent “United States of America”. That is why, then, in September

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<sup>6</sup> *Towards a Statement on the Church. Report of the Joint Commission between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Methodist Council, 1982-1986 Fourth Series*, in: *Information Service* n. 62, 1986/IV, pp. 206-216, here §33, p. 211.

1784 Wesley took it upon himself to ordain Richard Whatcoat and Thomas Vasey as “elders” for the Methodists in North America — and to “set apart” Thomas Coke, already a presbyter of the Church of England, as “superintendent” of the Methodist work there. Along with Francis Asbury, who was already in the United States, Coke was to exercise the kind of “oversight” among Methodists that Wesley himself exercised in Britain.

And with Coke, Whatcoat and Vasey, John Wesley sent over for use among the Methodist an “ordinal” (adapted from that of the Church of England) for the making of deacons, the ordaining of elders, and the ordaining of superintendents. Following the provisions made by Wesley, American Methodists have continued to care in that way for the orderly transmission of ministry.

In Britain, following Wesley's death, the Wesleyan Methodist Conference continued to take close care of the admission of preacher-pastors into “full connexion” (and indeed by laying on of hands, when it was for work in overseas missions) — and finally in 1836 the Wesleyan Methodist Conference resumed the practice of imposition of hands for ordination to the presbyterate, a practice retained in the British Methodist Conference to this day.

So, then, to sum up this first part of the lecture: Methodism does not, and could not possibly, claim “apostolic succession” in the sense commonly understood by Roman Catholics (leaving aside altogether the fact that any such succession would in any case be derived through the Anglican line and might therefore be considered “absolutely null and utterly void” — to coin a phrase). But nevertheless, Methodists do not lack a certain care for historical continuity in something of a “Clementine” sense — and that would be a basis on which to build when we come to face the question of an eventual integration of Methodism with, or into, the Catholic tradition.

But let us move meanwhile into the second part of this lecture by looking at the case of Methodism in a so-called “Ignatian” perspective (Ignatius of Antioch); that is, the perspective in which the later generations are viewed as a present manifestation of the Apostolic Church.

## II. The Present Manifestation of the Apostolic Church

Let me begin by reading to you a passage which John Wesley wrote in the Minutes of the 1745 Methodist Conference. I want you to listen to it stereophonically, or see it stereoscopically — for it is an account of the origins and early development of ministerial order in the apostolic Church, but Wesley is *also*, at *the same time*, obviously telling — with a view to justifying it — the story of the rise of Methodism under his own itinerant preaching and continuing oversight:

*“The plain origin of church-government seems to be this. Christ sends forth a preacher of the gospel. Some who hear him repent and believe the gospel. They then desire him to watch over them, to build them up in the faith and to guide their souls in the paths of righteousness....”*

*“Soon after, some from other parts, who are occasionally present while [the preacher] speaks in the name of [Christ] that sent him, beseech him to come over and help them, also. Knowing it to be the will of God, he complies, yet not till he has conferred with the wisest and holiest of this congregation and, with their advice, appointed one who has gifts and grace to watch over the flock till his return.*

*“If it please God to raise another flock in the new place, before [the preacher] leaves them, he does the same thing, appointing one whom God has fitted for the work to watch over these souls also. In like manner, in every place where it pleases God to gather a little flock by his Word, [the preacher] appoints one in his absence to take the oversight of the rest and to assist them of the ability which God giveth. These are deacons, or servants of the church, and look on their first pastor as their common father. And all these congregations regard him in the same light and esteem him still as the shepherd of their souls....”*

*“As these congregations increase, and as the deacons grow in years and in grace, they need other, subordinate deacons or helps, in respect of whom ... they may be called “Presbyters”, or elders, as their father in the Lord may be called the “Bishop” or Overseer of them all”<sup>7</sup>.*

As I said, this needs to be taken stereoscopically or stereophonically: it is Wesley's account *both* of the apostolic Church *and* of the rise of Methodism under himself.

In this way of viewing things, present occurrences that evidently enjoy divine blessings are taken as fresh instantiations of scriptural and apostolic events and structures — or at least of what God was doing in and through those events and structures.

And notice that, for Wesley, the emphasis is pragmatic and soteriological. In a letter of 25 June 1746, written to “John Smith”, Wesley asked the rhetorical question: “What is the end of all ecclesiastical order?” — and he immediately supplied his own answer:

*“Is it not to bring souls from the power of Satan to God? And to build them up in his fear and love? Order, then, is so far valuable as it answers these ends; and if it answers them not, it is nothing worth”<sup>8</sup>.*

From Wesley, Methodism has retained an attitude towards ecclesiastical order that is soteriologically governed and rather pragmatic in its criteria: its goals are evangelism and edification — the building up of the Church in both quantity and quality, in numbers and in depth. In aspiration, and hopefully in actuality,

<sup>7</sup> Quoted from A.C. Outler, *John Wesley*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1964, p. 154.

<sup>8</sup> F. Baker (ed.), *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 26, *Letters II 1740-1755*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982, p. 206.

that seems to me to provide some basis on which to claim identity with the Apostolic Church.

Now the Roman Catholic Church is not entirely a stranger to the putatively Ignatian model of the relationship between later generations and the Apostolic Church as that of a present manifestation, a fresh instantiation of the original. Since Vatican II, it has become common to view the present college of bishops, with the pope in their midst, as the repristination of the apostolic college gathered around Peter (and remember that a common title of the bishops of Rome in the earlier middle ages was “vicar of Peter” — a notion which Jean-Marie Tillard has revived by speaking of the “anamnesis of Peter”).

And traditionally within Roman Catholicism, the ministry stands in the service of human salvation, bearing the chief responsibilities for both evangelization *and* spiritual care. From patristic and medieval times, the bishop's duties have been recognized to include evangelizing, preaching, and teaching — all brought together ritually in his presidency over the process of Christian initiation. Note, for example, this fine Gallican prayer at the ordination of bishops:

*“May their feet, by thine aid, be beautiful for bringing good tidings of good. Give them, O Lord, a ministry of reconciliation in word and in deeds and in power of signs and wonders. Let their speech and preaching be not with enticing words of men's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power”*<sup>9</sup>.

Now the modern ecumenical movement has helped Methodists to see the present-day Roman Catholic Church (whatever may have been the case of the Catholic Church at certain periods in the past, and however justifiable and even necessary something like a disruptive Protestant Reformation may have been — and there would still be a whole theology to work out of the signs and significance of *discontinuity*, of rupture in the cause of renewal) — the ecumenical movement has helped Methodists to see the *present-day* Roman Catholic Church as an instrument of evangelism and the nourishment of the Christian life.

And reciprocally, Methodists may now hope to be reckoned by Roman Catholics among those who themselves (to use the words of Vatican II's *Unitatis Redintegratio*), by baptism and faith in Christ, stand in a certain, if imperfect, communion with the Catholic Church — and whose communities are not devoid of

meaning and importance in the mystery of salvation. This recognized value resides in part (we may hope) in the contribution which Methodism has so far made to the evangelization of the world and the guidance of souls towards God's kingdom.

As Roman Catholics, on their side, work at a theological reading of the place of Methodism in Christian history, we find the Joint Commission between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Methodist Council being able, in its Singapore Report of 1991, to speak of Methodism as “part of a fresh and extraordinary outpouring of the gift of the Spirit who never ceases to enliven and unify the Church”<sup>10</sup>.

That sentence, coming precisely from a document entitled *The Apostolic Tradition*, points us now to the third and final part of this lecture. Here I want to set forth a developing ecumenical perspective on the question of Apostolic Tradition.

### III. An Ecumenical Perspective on the Question of Apostolic Tradition

A developing ecumenical perspective on the question of Apostolic Tradition embraces both Clementine and Ignatian features in a yet more comprehensive vision that may allow progress in Catholic-Methodist rapprochement towards the goal stated by the international bilateral dialogue in both its Nairobi report, *Towards an Agreed Statement on the Church* (1986) and its Singapore report *The Apostolic Tradition* (1991): “full communion in faith, mission, and sacramental life”<sup>11</sup>.

We may begin this third part again from the “Ministry” section of *BEM*. Paragraph 34 of the Lima text reads, in its second half, thus:

*“Apostolic tradition in the Church means continuity in the permanent characteristics of the Church of the apostles: witness to the apostolic faith, proclamation and fresh interpretation of the Gospel, celebration of baptism and the eucharist, the transmission of ministerial responsibilities, communion in prayer, love, joy and suffering, service to the sick and the needy, unity among the local churches and sharing the gifts which the Lord has given to each”*.

It is within this more comprehensive context that the question of ministerial, and particularly episcopal, succession is properly treated. Are Catholics and Methodists ready, from their respective starting points, to see episcopal succession as an element, a factor — *one* element among *others*; *one* factor among *others* — in the Apostolic Tradition?

<sup>9</sup> *Missale Francorum* 9, 40 [=L.C. Mohlberg, L. Eizenhöfer, & P. Siffrin (eds.), *Missale Francorum (Cod. Vat. Reg. lat. 257)*, Rome: Herder (coll. “Rerum ecclesiasticarum documenta”, Series maior, Fontes, 2), 1957] and *Sacramentarium Gelasianum*, 770 [=L.C. Mohlberg, L. Eizenhöfer, & P. Siffrin (eds.), *Liber sacramentorum Romanae ecclesiae ordinis anni circuli (Cod. Vat. Reg. lat. 316/Paris Bibl. Nat. 7193, 41/56) (Sacramentarium Gelasianum)*, 3<sup>rd</sup> improved ed., Rome: Herder (coll. “Rerum ecclesiasticarum documenta”, Series maior, Fontes 4), 1981].

<sup>10</sup> *The Apostolic Tradition: Report of the Joint Commission between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Methodist Council*, in: *Information Service* n. 78, 1991/III-IV, pp. 212-225, here §93, p. 224.

<sup>11</sup> *Towards a Statement...*, *op. cit.*, §20, p. 209 cited in *The Apostolic Tradition...*, *op. cit.*, preface, p. 212 and §94, p. 224.

Let us look first at that *one* element, that *one* factor. *BEM* spoke of the “the episcopal succession as a sign, though not a guarantee, of the continuity and unity of the Church”<sup>12</sup>.

Now British Methodism, as you remember, does not have a ministry of bishops. As the Nairobi Report of 1986 put it:

*“The British Methodist Church did not in its origin reject episcopacy, but developed without it because of the historical circumstances of its origin”*<sup>13</sup>.

And then the report of the Joint Commission goes on:

*“In recent years it [=the Methodist Church of Great Britain] has expressed the willingness in principle to embrace episcopacy, for it has done so in certain reunion schemes outside Britain [e.g. Church of South India, 1947; Church of North India, 1970] and was willing to do so in England in certain schemes which did not eventually succeed [i.e. with the Church of England, 1969 and 1972; and the multi-church “Covenant” of 1980, 1982]”*<sup>14</sup>.

Under the right circumstances, British Methodists and, one must hope, American Methodists (who have the office of bishop, though not a succession in the Roman sense) would presumably be willing to enter into what the Joint Commission envisages as

*“a fresh creative act of reconciliation which acknowledges the manifold yet united activity of the Holy Spirit throughout the ages. It will involve a joint act of obedience to the sovereign Word of God”*<sup>15</sup>.

Meantime I make bold, as a Methodist, to ask the Roman Catholic Church to reconsider more favorably the *BEM* formulation of “episcopal succession as a sign, though not a guarantee, of the continuity of the Church”<sup>16</sup>. The official Roman Catholic response to *BEM* considered this inadequate — as did the Orthodox responses; both the Catholics and the Orthodox wished to retain the positive language of “guarantee”. A Methodist may perhaps be forgiven for remarking the irony that *both* Catholics and Orthodox, in a state of division between themselves, should claim a “guarantee”. For, logically, that depends on a Cyprianic ecclesiology, in which only the bishops of one's own community afford the guarantee, while bishops in schismatic bodies are at best dubious. *In so far as* the Orthodox and Roman Catholic

Churches have, in other respects, abandoned a (by the way, mutually exclusive) Cyprianic ecclesiology, the way is surely open for a second, and more positive, look at the formulation “sign, though not a guarantee” — in a way that Methodists (and other Protestants) might find more winsome.

Having looked at that *one* element, that *one* factor, it is now time to remember the *other* elements, the *other* factors, that *BEM* discerns as constituting the “apostolic Tradition” or “continuity in the permanent characteristics of the Church of the apostles”. For, insofar as Methodism may be judged to enjoy those other features, we may hope that they may mitigate in Catholic eyes our lack of the episcopal succession. Those other features, according to *BEM*, were:

- witness to the apostolic faith;
- proclamation and fresh interpretation of the Gospel;
- celebration of baptism and the eucharist;
- communion in prayer, love, joy and suffering;
- service to the sick and needy;
- unity among the local churches;
- sharing the gifts which the Lord has given to each<sup>17</sup>.

It is at this stage that the immense significance emerges of the 1991 Singapore Report of the Joint Commission between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Methodist Council on “The Apostolic Tradition”. What was attempted there, by way of as common a diachronic reading as possible of Christian history, was a common discernment of those permanent characteristics of the Church's life that each could then synchronically look for — and hopefully recognize — in the life of the other.

The Joint Commission was able to agree on a profoundly trinitarian description of the Church. First, in New Testament terms:

*“In the New Testament description of the birth of the Church, a role is attributed to each of the three Persons of the Trinity, which is both distinct and inseparable from the role of the other two. To the Father is attributed the gracious purpose by which we were chosen for filial adoption in union with the eternal Word before the foundation of the world. The actual work of founding the Church is attributed to the Son and to the Holy Spirit. The Son founds the Church by his act of Redemption. The Spirit is co-founder of the Church with the Son, by being the Church's principle of sanctification. The two divine missions — the sending of the Son and of the Spirit by the Father — are extensions in our world of time of the two eternal processions in the Trinity. The new relationship, both individual and corporate, which they bring about in human beings towards God, is none other than what the*

<sup>12</sup> *BEM*, M 38.

<sup>13</sup> *Towards a Statement...*, *op. cit.*, §33, p. 211.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *The Apostolic Tradition...*, *op. cit.*, §94, p. 224.

<sup>16</sup> *BEM*, M 38.

<sup>17</sup> *Cf. BEM*, M 34.

*New Testament calls the Church*<sup>18</sup>.

And then systematically:

*“Together Catholics and Methodists confess the Church as part of the Triune God’s eternal purpose for the salvation of humankind. The Church is the communion of those who have received, receive and will receive through faith the benefits of the redemptive work of God accomplished in the life, death and resurrection of the Word made flesh. In the Holy Spirit they acknowledge the lordship of Christ to the glory of the Father. Thus constituted and sustained by the Word and the Spirit, the Church is both a sign and an instrument of the Father’s good pleasure for the world: it is a sign, because it is the firstfruits of God’s gracious purpose and work; it is an instrument because it has the task of further proclaiming the Gospel and doing the works that belong to God’s kingdom. By its own communal life it bears witness to that society of love in which the city of God will consist”*<sup>19</sup>.

Within that framework of divine gift, the Joint Commission went on to discern, in remarkably convergent ways,

- “the pattern of Christian faith”<sup>20</sup>, with a solemn confession of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed;

- “the pattern of Christian life”<sup>21</sup>, seen as both “gift” and “challenge”, having a divine “source” that supplies the means of grace for those works of mercy and acts of witness that make up the “practice” of the new life — the whole sustained and expressed in the communion of the faithful; and

- “the pattern of Christian community”<sup>22</sup> where each lives for all.

In that context, the Singapore Report then went on in its second half to treat “ministry and ministries” as “serving within the Apostolic Tradition”. And again there was remarkable agreement between Methodists and Roman Catholics concerning: service of the Word; gifts of the Spirit; the Church, a living body; and the ordained ministry: call and empowerment.

The overwhelming “convergences” were not allowed to hide the remaining “divergences” (which obviously still need treatment). But the considerable achievement of the Singapore Report was to have provided a description of the Apostolic Tradition that may now serve as a looking-glass in which both Catholics and Methodists can respectively regard themselves self-critically, and the others benignly, in the hope of seeing what is necessary for both to be regarded as a “present manifestation” of that Apostolic Church whose “historic continuity” has been so threatened, perhaps even ruptured, but (in God’s good grace) never entirely lost — and which we may both hope to embody together into the future.

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<sup>18</sup> *The Apostolic Tradition...*, *op. cit.*, §7, p. 214.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* §99, p. 225.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, §§33-38, pp. 216f.

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, §§39-48, pp. 217-219.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, §§49-52, p. 219.



# CC

Centro Conferenze

## Questioni ecumeniche sulla giustizia, la pace e la salvaguardia della creazione

del

Dott. Alberto Quattrucci  
Comunità di S. Egidio, Roma

(Lezione tenuta durante il "Corso di Ecumenismo" al Centro Pro Unione, giovedì 22 settembre 1994)

### 1. La debolezza della fede

L'impegno sociale delle chiese cristiane è apparso, soprattutto in passato, spoglio di soluzioni immediate e di manifesti programmatici per risolvere i problemi che travagliano il mondo. Rispetto alle riunioni dei politici e degli esperti - bisogna riconoscerlo - i cristiani, come tali, rivelano un diverso livello di competenza.

Questo diverso livello di competenza è stato spesso considerato un sintomo evidente della debolezza e della povertà della fede.

Specie negli ultimi due secoli si è posato sui credenti lo sguardo ironico e scettico di chi considerava - o considera - la fede un retaggio del passato, senza parole sull'avvenire. La complessità del mondo moderno, con le sue soluzioni elaborate e ricche, sembrava avere la meglio sulla fede, considerata alla fine debole, povera, incompetente e divisa di fronte ai grandi problemi.

La "religione" era considerata una realtà in via di superamento di fronte al progresso contemporaneo: questa coscienza è cresciuta con il ritmo dello sviluppo; è stata fatta propria da Stati e sistemi. Un acuto storico e sociologo francese, Emile Poulat, poteva concludere uno studio sul cristianesimo descrivendo con questa espressione la coscienza di molti contemporanei: "*Hai vinto, Modernità, e ciò ti conferisce la legittimità storica. Ci domini, ci tieni in pugno, ci trascini chissà dove...*".

Ma anche solo nella prospettiva storica di chi osserva lo sviluppo delle vicende umane, non ancora in quella del credente, bisogna riconoscere che questa liquidazione della "religione" come fenomeno del passato non è un fatto reale. Ogni fede viene dal passato, spesso remoto, ma proprio nella contemporaneità sta vivendo una stagione vitale. Basterebbe osservare solo l'ultimo decennio per vedere come l'ispirazione religiosa sia stata un elemento fondamentale nella ricerca della libertà, di una maggiore dignità della vita umana, di nuovi sistemi ed equilibri politici.

La vita religiosa e l'ispirazione religiosa hanno conservato, acquistato o ripreso un ruolo decisivo nelle diverse società, animando cambiamenti, sostenendo nella speranza e nella sofferenza, nutrendo aspirazioni per un mondo giusto e pacifico. Bisogna ammettere che la fede in sé non ha la competenza per risolvere i gravi problemi del mondo contemporaneo, eppure questi problemi la interpellano: la pace e la guerra, soprattutto,

rappresentano una sfida per tutti i cristiani e per ogni credente.

### 2. Il nostro secolo: dialogo ecumenico e pace

Il nostro secolo, in particolare, ha assistito ad un percorso molto originale di dialogo ecumenico. C'è stata un'accelerazione nell'incontro: l'emigrazione ha messo in contatto gente di tradizioni cristiane diverse, le comunicazioni e un intenso lavoro culturale hanno fatto conoscere gli uni dagli altri.

Con l'Assemblea di Edimburgo del 1910 inizia quello che si può definire il movimento ecumenico moderno.

Si tratta ancora di un ecumenismo tra le Chiese cristiane e le organizzazioni protestanti, non partecipa la Chiesa cattolica e non ancora quelle ortodosse. Emerge già tuttavia, oltre al problema dell'unità, il tema della pace, frequentemente trattato nelle assemblee e negli incontri.

Un esempio è l'importante iniziativa di Soderblöm, arcivescovo luterano di Uppsala, che nel 1914 pubblica un appello per la pace, a cui aderiscono i capi delle chiese dei paesi neutrali, non però quelli delle nazioni coinvolte nel conflitto. Uppsala diventa, seppure per un periodo limitato, il centro delle iniziative ecclesiali per la pace.

Si diffonde nel primo dopoguerra, particolarmente in una certa area evangelica, la coscienza di un impegno delle chiese per il dialogo, capace di superare i confini nazionali e di affrontare i grandi temi della pace e della giustizia sociale.

Il Consiglio Ecumenico delle Chiese si costituisce nell'assemblea di Amsterdam, nel 1948, sul tema: "Disordine del mondo e disegno di Dio". Partecipano le delegazioni di 147 chiese da 44 paesi. A tre anni appena dalla fine del secondo conflitto mondiale, i cristiani affermano concordemente ad Amsterdam: "*Il ruolo svolto dalla guerra nella vita internazionale è un peccato contro Dio e una degradazione dell'uomo*".

D'altra parte, nel nostro secolo, i rapporti tra cristiani si sono profondamente intensificati anche per un'altra strada: la solidarietà concreta, specie nei momenti drammatici. Soprattutto con la seconda guerra mondiale, con le esperienze dei campi di prigionia, di sterminio, con il carcere, con l'orrore di sterminate distruzioni di vite umane, con le tante persecuzioni religiose, con lunghe stagioni di oppressione, è sorta una solidarietà concreta e

profonda.

Genti di differenti tradizioni cristiane si sono sentite corresponsabili.

Il processo di sviluppo dell'indipendenza del Terzo Mondo ha visto personalità anche di diversa religione l'una a fianco dell'altra: non si può ad esempio non ricordare la figura dell'arcivescovo di Algeri, il Card. Duval, che, malgrado la sua origine francese e quella europea della maggioranza dei suoi fedeli cattolici, si è schierato coraggiosamente per l'autodeterminazione dell'Algeria.

Questa coscienza, dal dopoguerra ad oggi, si diffonde progressivamente tra le chiese: molti cristiani, uomini e donne, sono ormai impegnati nel sostenere la coscienza mondiale secondo cui la guerra è un male profondo.

L'Assemblea del Consiglio Ecumenico delle chiese, nel 1983 a Vancouver, dichiara: *“è improbabile che una guerra nucleare rimanga limitata e pertanto qualunque progetto di uso `limitato' di ordigni nucleari dovrebbe essere scoraggiato... — ed aggiunge — nessuna guerra nucleare può essere giustificabile, dato che la portata delle devastazioni causate sarebbe enormemente sproporzionata agli ipotizzabili benefici o vantaggi che ne potrebbero derivare”*.

Così l'esperienza degli ultimi decenni assiste al proliferare di riunioni e incontri a livello internazionale e regionale per conoscersi, capirsi, dialogare, confrontarsi sui grandi temi dell'umanità. Non sempre questi incontri sono stati compresi dai contemporanei, ma hanno rappresentato una storia preziosa, quella del desiderio di trascendere le divisioni, le amarezze, i risentimenti, quel terreno su cui prosperano le radici della guerra. Sono, così, una eredità da non perdere per il presente e per le giovani generazioni, che possono beneficiare dell'impegno di uomini saggi e pensosi sui destini del mondo.

### 3. La Chiesa cattolica e il vento nuovo del Concilio

Se fino agli anni '60 l'atteggiamento della Chiesa di Roma nei confronti di questo movimento di dialogo ecumenico, occorre riconoscerlo, non è stato particolarmente ricco di impegno, il Concilio Vaticano II segna una svolta.

Noi apparteniamo ad una generazione di cristiani che è cresciuta nel clima inaugurato dal Concilio, e di questa ricchezza oggi sentiamo di dover rispondere in modo responsabile, come di un bene e di una eredità preziosi.

Il Patriarca ecumenico Athenagoras rivolgendosi ad Olivier Clément e ricordando i suoi primi anni di studio ad Haiki, faceva metaforicamente riferimento al Parsifal di Wagner ed affermava: *“Poiché l'ecumenismo è la più grande realtà del XX secolo, in fondo non è altro che la ricerca del Santo Graal, del Calice dove tutti potremo dissetarci col Sangue di Dio...”* e con rammarico aggiungeva: *“...sono stati questi libri a ridestarmi. Poiché i nostri professori mai ci parlavano di ciò che può esservi di buono nelle altre chiese... ci parlavano soltanto delle differenze, delle eresie, di ciò che oppone, non di ciò che unisce. Era l'insegnamento della paura”*.

La voce attualissima di questo grande testimone ci riporta ad una stagione di tensioni, di distanze che sembra ormai lontana, superata dal cammino profondo di questi decenni. Eppure, il pegno di questo cammino e le mutate condizioni storiche all'interno delle quali oggi cerchiamo l'unità, ci impongono una riconsiderazione delle nostre responsabilità.

La ricerca di unità ha vissuto, dal Concilio Vaticano II ad oggi, momenti altamente significativi, obbedendo allo spirito e alla lettera del decreto *“Unitatis Redintegratio”*.

Ma non mi dilungherò sul commento dei documenti conciliari, che credo abbiate già trattato precedentemente. Vorrei piuttosto sottolineare alcuni temi fondamentali così come emergono dal Concilio stesso e che sostituiscono le linee portanti del dialogo ecumenico sulla giustizia e la pace, negli ultimi decenni.

### 4. Pace e giustizia sociale: premesse per il dialogo

La giustizia, la pace e la salvaguardia della creazione sono prima di tutto delle sfide alle chiese. Ciò esige un confronto tra il nostro intendimento della fede ed i problemi del nostro tempo. Il dialogo e la cooperazione, necessari per affrontare in modo obiettivo questioni riguardanti campi tanto diversi, sono possibili solo in queste condizioni.

L'insegnamento sociale della Chiesa prepara la nostra propria fede in modo tale che questa possa divenire capace di dare soluzioni ai problemi sociali e di generare un'azione sociale.

La dottrina sociale della Chiesa cattolica riconduce incessantemente i suoi enunciati ad una antropologia teologica: i problemi politici si impongono sempre più come problemi umani e culturali e sempre meno in termini di dominio effettivo della natura. Si è liberi così dal pericolo di un riassunto teologico dal carattere statico: l'antropologia deve essere ricentrata sul Cristo.

“La dignità della persona umana”<sup>1</sup> costituisce il punto di partenza per un dialogo tra tutti sull'argomento dell'essenza comune dell'uomo. Tre partono da questa dottrina della creazione: l'uomo come immagine di Dio, la natura sociale (l'uomo e donna) e la sua relazione con le altre creature.

Continuando a seguire il testo della *“Gaudium et Spes”* incontriamo le premesse fondamentali per un dialogo costruttivo sulla pace e la giustizia. Le enunciamo brevemente:

- La struttura fondamentale dell'uomo, in quanto corpo e anima: “Corpo e anima, ma veramente uno”<sup>2</sup>. Tutto il mondo materiale trova allora il suo senso non solo dall'esterno ma a partire dall'interno.

- La dignità dell'intelligenza, la verità e la sapienza<sup>3</sup>. *“L'epoca nostra, più ancora che i secoli passati, ha bisogno di questa sapienza, perché diventino più umane tutte le sue nuove scoperte”*.

<sup>1</sup> *Gaudium et Spes* §12.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, §14.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, §15.



- La dignità della coscienza morale<sup>4</sup>. Il punto di partenza è l'esperienza della coscienza e del fatto che questa coscienza non poggia sulla volontà umana ma gli è donata. Questa esperienza universale della coscienza spinge i cristiani ad unirsi ad altri uomini "per cercare la verità e per risolvere secondo verità tanti problemi morali, che sorgono tanto nella vita dei singoli quanto in quella sociale".

- La grandezza della libertà<sup>5</sup>. "La vera libertà è nell'uomo segno altissimo dell'immagine divina... la dignità dell'uomo richiede che egli agisca secondo scelte consapevoli e libere... non per un cieco impulso interno o per mera coazione esterna... Questa ordinazione verso Dio, la libertà dell'uomo, poiché è stata ferita dal peccato, non può renderla effettiva in pieno se non mediante l'aiuto della grazia di Dio".

Questi motivi mi sembrano chiave e premessa di ogni dialogo ecumenico sulla giustizia e la pace, fermo restando che il fondamento teologico che determina ogni costruzione cristiana del mondo resta "la nuova legge dell'amore".

### 5. La pace

La questione della pace è una questione che conduce prima di tutto all'uomo: si pone infatti come questione antropologica.

"Quando si interroga sulla pace, l'uomo è portato ad interrogarsi sul senso e sulle condizioni della propria esistenza, personale e comunitaria"<sup>6</sup>.

Di fronte alle antropologie ridotte, che portano in sé le radici della guerra (es. "homo economicus"), l'antropologia cristiana presenta le ragioni per le quali la pace è possibile: "Noi crediamo che, senza l'illuminazione e l'aiuto del Cristo, la pace vera, stabile ed universale è impossibile"<sup>7</sup>. Così nel nostro mondo attuale l'appello alla preghiera per la pace resta fondamentale. La capacità di pace di ogni essere umano è infatti il frutto della fedeltà creatrice di Dio.

"La pace sarà possibile solo quando, attraverso la nostra riconciliazione con Dio, noi ci riconciliamo anche gli uni con gli altri, e lo faremo combattendo il peccato e ristabilendo una relazione vera con Dio"<sup>8</sup>.

Ma una società politica non può collaborare efficacemente alla costruzione della pace internazionale se non è essa stessa pacificata, cioè se, nel suo ambito, non si assume seriamente la promozione dei diritti dell'uomo. Inoltre "la pace non è mai una cosa acquisita una volta per tutte, ma è da costruire incessantemente"<sup>9</sup>. "Non è uno stato di apatia pubblica... ma al contrario un equilibrio che si appoggia sul movimento e dispiega continue

energie di spirito e d'azione: è una forza intelligente e viva"<sup>10</sup>.

Ma, è chiaro, non c'è pace senza giustizia. "La pace non è semplice assenza della guerra, né può ridursi unicamente a rendere stabile l'equilibrio delle forze contrastanti, né è effetto di una dispotica dominazione, ma essa viene con tutta esattezza definita opera della giustizia"<sup>11</sup>. La pace, in altri termini, "non esisterà senza soddisfare la fame e la sete di giustizia; non dimenticherà mai gli sforzi da realizzare per difendere i deboli, per soccorrere i poveri, per promuovere la causa degli umili, non tradirà mai, per vivere, le ragioni superiori della vita"<sup>12</sup>.

In questo senso, la prima azione e la prima "politica" per favorire questo processo di pace è chiara: cambiare le idee che governano gli uomini e quindi il cuore stesso dell'uomo.

Risultano quindi essenziali all'impegno delle chiese altre due dimensioni a cui accenno soltanto: 1. l'educazione alla pace ed il suo fine, una nuova intelligenza della pace: "Bisogna disarmare gli spiriti se vogliamo impedire efficacemente il ricorso alle armi che colpiscono i corpi"<sup>13</sup>. 2. La promozione della pace e lo sviluppo su scala mondiale, come impegno e responsabilità per i paesi ricchi e cristiani, occasione di uscire dall'egoismo collettivo per aprirsi ad un orizzonte più ampio.

Giustizia, sviluppo, solidarietà sono sinonimi di pace.

### 6. La giustizia sociale

"Dio ha voluto che gli uomini formassero una sola famiglia e si trattassero tra loro come fratelli"<sup>14</sup>.

Perciò la società non è qualcosa di sopraggiunto o accidentale per l'uomo. Al contrario, è nella personalità dell'essere umano che essa si forma e che acquisisce il suo fondamento ed il suo punto di riferimento: "Dall'indole sociale dell'uomo appare evidente come il perfezionamento della persona umana e lo sviluppo della stessa società siano tra loro interdipendenti. Infatti, principio, soggetto e fine di tutte le istituzioni sociali è e deve essere la persona umana, come quella che, per sua stessa natura, ha assolutamente bisogno di una vita sociale"<sup>15</sup>.

Ogni forma di vita sociale dev'essere orientata verso il "bene comune", che viene così definito: "...l'insieme delle condizioni sociali che permettono, tanto ai gruppi quanto a ciascuno dei loro membri, di raggiungere la loro perfezione in un modo più totale e più semplice"<sup>16</sup>.

Il punto di partenza del discorso sulla giustizia sociale è dato, allora, dalla "uguaglianza fondamentale" di tutti gli uomini. La

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., §16.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., §17.

<sup>6</sup> Messaggio Pace 1982.

<sup>7</sup> Messaggio Pace 1978.

<sup>8</sup> Conferenza Episcopale Tedesca 1983.

<sup>9</sup> Gaudium et Spes, §78.

<sup>10</sup> Messaggio Pace 1978.

<sup>11</sup> Gaudium et Spes, §78.

<sup>12</sup> Messaggio Pace 1974.

<sup>13</sup> Messaggio Pace 1975.

<sup>14</sup> Gaudium et Spes, §24.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., §25.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., §26.

dignità fondamentale di ognuno non si fonda su qualità meritate o acquisite, ma sul fatto che “tutti sono creati a immagine di Dio” e che “*tutti, riscattati dal Cristo, godono di una stessa vocazione e di uno stesso destino divino*”.

La giustizia è vista come un processo: il punto di partenza minimo e ideale risiede nel riconoscimento dei diritti fondamentali di ciascuno. La loro violazione si oppone sempre al piano di Dio. Del resto, l'uguale dignità delle persone, esige che si giunga a delle condizioni di vita giuste e più umane.

È necessario contribuire al bene comune.

La conversione personale dei cristiani rappresenta una condizione decisiva per la piena realizzazione della giustizia.

La Chiesa, nel corso dei secoli, ha esplicitato alla luce del Vangelo dei principi di giustizia e di equità, come: l'equilibrio tra l'aver e l'essere; il problema dello sviluppo e del progresso tecnico; la distribuzione dei beni della terra per tutti; il bisogno di profonde riforme economiche; ecc.

*“L'uomo vale più per ciò che è che non per ciò che ha. Allo stesso modo, tutto ciò che gli uomini fanno per far regnare più giustizia, una fraternità più estesa, un ordine più umano nei rapporti sociali, supera in valore i progressi tecnici”*<sup>17</sup>.

La Chiesa, in quanto comunità religiosa e gerarchica, non ha soluzioni concrete di ordine sociale, politico o economico per la giustizia nel mondo. I cristiani devono compiere con fedeltà e competenza le loro opere terrene: nei diversi campi sta a loro di prendere le loro responsabilità.

Una nuova presa di coscienza si sta formando su scala mondiale e si esprime tra le altre cose attraverso dei movimenti e nel dialogo.

Il fondamento della ricerca cristiana della giustizia risiede nell'opera di redenzione del Cristo. Da questa deriva la capacità dell'uomo di realizzare il comandamento dell'amore del prossimo, insieme alla necessità di una metanoia continua.

### 7. La salvaguardia della creazione

*“Mentre folle immense mancano dello stretto necessario, alcuni anche nei Paesi meno sviluppati, vivono nell'opulenza e dissipano i beni. Il lusso si accompagna alla miseria”*<sup>18</sup>.

*“Dio ha destinato la terra e tutto ciò che essa contiene all'uso di tutti gli uomini e di tutti i popoli, in modo che i beni della creazione devono equamente affluire nelle mani di tutti”*<sup>19</sup>.

Nel tempo presente siamo oppressi da scenari catastrofici, da minacce globali come cambiamenti di clima, armi nucleari, sprechi di materie prime, e molto ancora. Facilmente si potrebbe avere l'impressione che sia la paura della distruzione a portarci all'impegno per la salvaguardia della creazione. Tuttavia non è questo il vero punto di partenza per il cristiano. Esso va infatti cercato nell'amore e nella fedeltà di Dio per le sue creature e per

il creato.

*“In principio Dio creò il cielo e la terra”*<sup>20</sup>. Il primo capitolo della Bibbia interpreta il mondo come l'opera ben ordinata di una volontà pianificatrice, creatrice: *“E Dio vide quanto aveva fatto; ed ecco era cosa molto buona”*<sup>21</sup>.

Il Dio creatore ha affidato la creazione alla cura dell'umanità alla sua presenza<sup>22</sup>. Si tratta di una amministrazione, non di una proprietà, perché il Dio Creatore rimane il solo padrone, nel senso pieno del termine, dell'intera creazione. Come dice il salmista: *“Del Signore è la terra e quanto contiene, l'universo e i suoi abitanti. È lui che l'ha fondata sui mari e sui fiumi l'ha stabilita”*<sup>23</sup>.

Dal momento che è vero che il libro della Genesi presenta l'essere umano come la creatura più privilegiata, noi non abbiamo il diritto di dimenticare che l'intera creazione è ordinata alla gloria di Dio. Questo è il messaggio fondamentale del Sabato<sup>24</sup>.

Dobbiamo allora riconsiderare l'etica che ha prevalso negli ultimi secoli che, in contrasto con il significato reale della Parola di Dio, ha permesso che l'umanità “dominasse” e “soggiogasse” la creazione per i suoi propri scopi quando, al contrario, l'umanità dovrebbe comportarsi come un amministratore al servizio sia di Dio che della stessa creazione. Quindi l'umanità deve preservare e promuovere l'integrità della creazione in obbedienza a Dio, per il bene delle generazioni future.

D'altro canto il conflitto tra fede della chiesa e scienza naturale, che ha caratterizzato alcuni secoli dell'epoca moderna, era sintomo di una certa divisione di coscienza che occorre sia pienamente riconciliata. Non si chiede la rinuncia alla scienza, non la rinuncia alla ricerca della verità. Si richiede la collaborazione alla mutazione politica delle diverse società, così che in esse i mezzi tecnici con fini ben delimitati vengano usati secondo la loro natura. Ciò vale per la promozione della pace tra gli uomini e per la pace con la natura.

Di fronte agli intricati dilemmi riguardanti i modelli di “consumo galoppante” gli sprechi e le ingiuste distribuzioni di beni, il progressivo esaurimento delle risorse della terra, non vi è una formula cristiana capace di risolvere ogni problema. La fondamentale premessa teologica per una “ecogiustizia” è che Dio, il nostro Creatore, ci assicura le risorse della terra per soddisfare i bisogni umani, ma solo se consumiamo e usiamo queste risorse in modo responsabile.

Vi è molta saggezza in questa preghiera del libro dei Proverbi: *“Non mi dare né povertà né ricchezze, ma cibami del pane che m'è necessario, ond'io, essendo sazio, non giunga a rinnegarti, e a dire: ‘Chi è l'Eterno?’ ovvero, diventato povero, non rubi, e*

<sup>20</sup> Gen. 1, 1.

<sup>21</sup> Gen. 1, 31.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Gen. 1, 28 — 2, 15.

<sup>23</sup> Ps. 24, 1-2.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Gen. 2, 3.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, §35.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, §63.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, §69.

*profani il nome del mio Dio*"<sup>25</sup>.

Teologicamente pace, giustizia sociale e salvaguardia della creazione sono tre termini complementari, tre doni di Dio, tre principi essenziali affidati da Dio alla responsabilità dell'umanità. Non c'è pace tra gli uomini senza pace con la natura. L'ingiustizia sociale è la distribuzione ingiusta dei beni: non c'è giustizia sociale là dove l'uomo dilapida le risorse della natura.

La pace può essere considerata come la sintesi dei tre doni. La promozione di una pace autentica implica necessariamente la promozione della giustizia e l'integrità del creato, così come la libertà ed i diritti umani, che sono due elementi essenziali della giustizia.

### **8. Un'assemblea mondiale dei cristiani per la giustizia, la pace, la salvaguardia della creazione**

L'origine del cosiddetto "processo conciliare" tra le chiese si può far risalire allo scritto di Von Weizsacker uscito nel 1986, tradotto in italiano con il titolo "Il tempo stringe". Von Weizsacker riprende un'idea di Bonhoeffer, il quale nel '34, di fronte all'avvicinarsi della seconda guerra mondiale, affermò che solo un concilio per la pace di tutte le chiese cristiane avrebbe potuto salvare il mondo dalla catastrofe che il nazismo andava preparando. Purtroppo quest'idea di Bonhoeffer non si realizzò e fu la guerra, che dopo aver causato milioni e milioni di morti si concluse aprendo l'era nucleare.

L'assemblea plenaria del Consiglio ecumenico delle chiese rilanciò l'idea nel 1983, e presentò un'istanza di convocazione di un concilio ecumenico per la pace. Il Consiglio ecumenico, a Vancouver, decise di tenere nel 1990 — ma le date ed il tema stesso erano da precisare — una conferenza mondiale delle chiese sulla giustizia, la pace e la conservazione del creato.

Nel giugno del 1985, a Düsseldorf, l'assemblea della Chiesa evangelica tedesca fece il seguente appello: "*Chiediamo alle chiese del mondo di convocare un concilio. Oggi la pace è condizione per la sopravvivenza dell'umanità. Essa non è garantita. In un concilio ecumenico, convocato per la pace, le chiese cristiane, solidalmente responsabili, devono dire una parola che l'umanità non possa ignorare. Il tempo stringe. Preghiamo i capi delle chiese di fare tutto il possibile perché il concilio si raduni al più presto. Preghiamo le comunità di dare forza, con il loro appoggio esplicito, all'appello ad un concilio*".

Mentre tale appello va a rafforzare la delibera del Consiglio ecumenico delle chiese dell'83, Von Weizsacker si pone il problema di realizzare questa Assemblea come un'incontro pienamente ecumenico e di riempirla di contenuto.

È il tempo in cui il Papa ha invitato ad Assisi, nell'ottobre 1986, i rappresentanti delle chiese cristiane e delle grandi religioni mondiali per una giornata di preghiera per la pace.

"Il tempo stringe", nell'intenzione dell'autore, vuole servire alla preparazione dell'Assemblea delle chiese; si pone il problema del nome, dei contenuti da trattare, dell'organizzazione di questo

concilio dei cristiani. Riassume il compito delle chiese in tre voci: 1. Ricerca della verità (la forza della chiesa di lasciarsi richiamare alla propria origine... lo Spirito della verità che è anche Spirito della fraternità); 2. Immagini dell'evento e visione dei contenuti (dialogo con la cultura occidentale ed escatologia); 3. Pensiero razionale e discorso profetico (risolutezza morale, disponibilità inesauribile al dialogo, all'ascolto, al compromesso ragionevole, alla ragione autocritica, cioè al discorso razionale).

Quindi l'autore passa a quella che chiama una "analisi mondana" dei problemi contemporanei — giustizia sociale, pace politica, conservazione della natura — ed all'identificazione dell'origine di tali problemi nel processo di realizzazione della "cultura superiore". Sottolineando come mai come ora questa realtà del mondo costituisce una sfida per la chiesa, Von Weizsacker fornisce alcuni spunti sulla teologia della pace, concludendo con una ipotesi organizzativa dell'assemblea delle chiese e con l'affermazione finale: "Il tempo è maturo".

### **9. L'Assemblea ecumenica di Basilea: "Pace nella Giustizia"**

Come tappa del processo conciliare "Giustizia, Pace e Salvaguardia del Creato", si tenne a Basilea dal 15 al 21 maggio 1989 la prima assemblea promossa congiuntamente dai vertici delle chiese anglicane, protestanti e ortodosse da una parte, e dalla Chiesa cattolica dall'altra.

Motivo dell'Assemblea: far fronte a quella che fu chiamata una sfida di dimensione planetaria, "*Una sfida di vita o di morte, che non riguarda più solo il problema della Pace, ma anche quelli della Giustizia (rapporto Nord-Sud, debito estero, neo-colonialismo...) e della Salvaguardia del Creato (distruzione delle foreste amazzoniche, piogge acide, buco nell'ozono, effetto serra...)*".

A convocare l'Assemblea furono ufficialmente la Conferenza delle Chiese Europee (KEK) E il Consiglio delle Conferenze Episcopali Europee (CCEE).

L'origine della KEK — organizzazione ecumenica autonoma delle chiese ortodosse, protestanti e anglicane d'Europa, che collabora strettamente con il Consiglio ecumenico delle chiese — risale all'epoca della guerra fredda: nell'Europa lacerata e divisa degli anni Quaranta e Cinquanta, era vivo il desiderio di superare le divisioni politiche per poter affrontare insieme i problemi comuni dei popoli europei sconvolti dalla guerra. Cristiani dell'Europa occidentale, essenzialmente dell'Olanda e delle due Germanie, lanciarono l'idea di una Conferenza delle chiese europee, destinata a promuovere la comprensione a livello internazionale. Dopo alcune riunioni preparatorie, nel gennaio 1959 i rappresentanti di oltre 40 chiese si incontrarono a Nyborg (Danimarca) per la prima Assemblea. Al tempo di Basilea facevano parte della KEK 118 chiese di diverse confessioni: ortodossi, anglicani, vetero cattolici e protestanti di differenti denominazioni (luterani, riformati, battisti, metodisti, chiese libere). A partire dal 1978 la KEK ha organizzato insieme alla CCEE degli incontri comuni di studio e di riflessione (Chantilly, Francia nel 1978; Logumkloster, Danimarca nel 1981; Riva del

<sup>25</sup> Prov. 30, 8-9.

Garda, Italia nel 1984; Erfurt, Germania orientale nel 1988).

Il tema della sfida alle chiese, raccolto dall'Assemblea di Basilea, viene sottolineato in più occasioni dai Presidenti dei due organismi convocanti, il Card. Carlo Maria Martini (CCEE) e il Metropolita di Leningrado Alexij (KEK).

Si legge nel documento preparatorio di Basilea:

*“L'Europa è un continente diviso. I cristiani, uniti nella fede, nella speranza e nell'amore che superano tutte le frontiere, sono chiamati a dare testimonianza di una immagine cristiana degli esseri umani...”*

*“Il mondo è diviso e lacerato da guerre e da preparativi di guerra, da ingiustizie e disprezzo dei diritti umani, da condizioni di commercio, da sistemi monetari e dalla distruzione dell'ambiente in Europa e in tutto il mondo.*

*“...Noi confessiamo che noi e le nostre chiese siamo stati e siamo profondamente in questi sviluppi. Non siamo riusciti, in presenza di una storia di violenza, a far nascere l'alternativa dell'amore.*

*“Confessando il nostro peccato, noi speriamo in un nuovo inizio. Esso nasce da una modifica del nostro comportamento...”*

*“...Siamo consapevoli di avere contribuito, come chiese e come cristiani in Europa, a molte delle divisioni che danneggiano l'Europa e il mondo. La nostra divisione come chiese contribuisce alla persistenza di questi mali.*

*“Vogliamo incontrarci a Basilea per dare una testimonianza comune in parole e in opere per la giustizia, la pace e l'integrità del creato, per cercare un dialogo e un accordo più profondo tra le chiese e con gli altri nella nostra società.*

*“Noi riteniamo che questi compiti siano molto urgenti. Ogni ritardo nell'affrontarli è costoso in termini di vite umane e di distruzione dell'ambiente.*

*“Il tempo opportuno della decisione — il kairòs — è qui. Noi, a differenza del giovane ricco, non dobbiamo perdere questa opportunità”.*

Di fronte alle divisioni del mondo l'Assemblea di Basilea ha costituito già in se stessa un segno di pace.

L'ampia preparazione nei mesi precedenti ed il lavoro dell'Assemblea svoltosi in riunioni plenarie ed in gruppi tematici, ha affrontato numerose problematiche a cui vorrei, di seguito, solo accennare.

a) L'analisi delle così dette “sfide globali” all'umanità: l'ingiustizia e la povertà, la violenza e la paura della violenza, la distruzione dell'ambiente naturale...

b) La comune responsabilità dei cristiani che prende le mosse dalla fede comune nella Parola viva di Dio: la missione di riconciliare; l'annuncio del Vangelo della pace (legata inescindibilmente alla giustizia ed all'integrità del creato); il superamento delle divisioni confessionali e la tensione all'unità dei cristiani; il cammino di metanoia rispetto ad ogni questione

fondamentale...

c) L'identificazione delle strutture di peccato a cui l'Europa partecipa: l'ineguale distribuzione della ricchezza; la corsa agli armamenti ed il traffico di armi; le forme di produzione industriale che danneggiano l'ambiente...

Altri e numerosi furono in generale i temi affrontati, tra cui anche i “segni di speranza” di fronte alle nuove situazioni politiche e al diffondersi dell'impegno per la pace. Un tema particolare: le rinnovate responsabilità per le chiese, chiamate a svolgere un ruolo tutto nuovo nella imminente “casa europea”, situata nel giardino del mondo.

Fu sottolineato più volte come l'Assemblea di Basilea fosse un processo e non un evento: si trattava cioè di guardare avanti per la continuazione di tale processo e di programmare concretamente i modi per continuare la preghiera, lo studio e l'azione comune delle chiese.

## 10. L'Assemblea mondiale di Seoul:

### “Giustizia, Pace e Salvaguardia del creato”

Il “processo conciliare” su Giustizia, pace e salvaguardia del creato, deciso all'assemblea di Vancouver (1983), ha celebrato il primo momento pubblico con l'assemblea mondiale di Seoul, che si è svolta dal 5 al 12 marzo 1990.

È stato descritto da alcuni come il tentativo di dire una parola cristiana sulla società contemporanea. I partecipanti ufficiali all'Assemblea - oltre ai consiglieri, gli invitati, i visitatori, etc. - sono stati 404 delegati.

Le giornate hanno avuto come quadro di riferimento una relazione generale, tenuta dal pastore Frank Chikane, segretario del Consiglio delle chiese del Sud Africa. Egli ha così definito i compiti dell'Assemblea: “Siamo chiamati: 1) a definire insieme quali sono le minacce maggiori che pesano oggi sul nostro pianeta assediato; 2) a formulare delle affermazioni teologiche sui problemi legati alla giustizia, alla pace e alla salvaguardia del creato; 3) a proporre alle chiese degli atti di impegno reciproco, elaborati sulla base della nostra fede, per fare fronte alle minacce che pesano sulla vita”.

La sua relazione ha suscitato alcune critiche. Si è caratterizzata infatti come una relazione tutta politica, fatta ad un'assemblea di chiese per motivare delle scelte fatte in quanto chiese. Inoltre con alcuni vistosi scompensi: nulla è detto dei mutamenti storici avvenuti nell'ultimo anno nell'Europa del socialismo reale; le responsabilità di quelle che lui chiama “le ore buie che oggi viviamo” è tutta dell'occidente a economia di mercato; nulla è detto sulle cause anche interne ai singoli continenti, come l'Africa o l'America latina.

La maggior parte dei lavori si svolsero a Seoul in 20 gruppi tematici, seppure, nell'avanzare delle giornate, si è sempre più avvertita la necessità di incontri per aree geografiche.

Il documento finale, votato in assemblea, è composto di due parti:

a) Le dieci “affermazioni”, che costituiscono la base dell'impegno delle chiese su giustizia, pace e salvaguardia del

creato. Esse sono: 1) Affermiamo che bisogna rendere conto a Dio di ogni esercizio del potere. 2) Affermiamo l'opzione di Dio per i poveri. 3) Affermiamo l'uguale valore di tutte le razze e di tutti i popoli. 4) Affermiamo che uomini e donne sono creati ad immagine di Dio. 5) Affermiamo che la verità è una delle basi di una comunità di esseri liberi. 6) Affermiamo la pace di Gesù Cristo. 7) Affermiamo che la creazione è amata da Dio. 8) Affermiamo che la terra appartiene a Dio. 9) Affermiamo la dignità e l'impegno delle giovani generazioni. 10) Affermiamo che i diritti umani sono dati da Dio.

b) I tre atti di "alleanza", che le chiese stipuleranno tra di loro. Tali atti avrebbero dovuto sancire la convergenza delle chiese su un elenco di obiettivi specifici raggruppati in tre ambiti: l'attuale ordine economico internazionale e la crisi del debito; le strategie di sicurezza totale; l'effetto serra. In realtà le specificazioni concrete sul contenuto degli atti — parte essenziale delle alleanze — non furono votate a Seoul e vennero demandate ad un comitato di redazione.

Alcune riflessioni generali sull'assemblea.

- Diversi furono i disagi espressi per l'approssimazione delle procedure da un lato e per certi procedimenti estenuanti dall'altro. Di fronte a questo un delegato africano, che affermò di parlare a nome di tutto il continente, si alzò in assemblea, lamentando: "*I nostri problemi quasi non sono stati toccati, non ci avete preso sul serio, siamo delusi e torneremo a casa frustrati; non possiamo accettare questo testo e voteremo contro*".

- Mancato fu il coinvolgimento della chiesa locale. La presenza breve e rapida del Card. Kim ed il coinvolgimento del Consiglio delle chiese della Corea, che rappresenta solo il 20 % delle chiese cristiane del paese.

- Diverse le critiche ai testi dei materiali preparatori.

Gli ortodossi ed i cattolici accusarono il testo semplicemente di povertà teologica. A conclusione dei lavori, il metropolita

Damaskinos, rappresentante del Patriarcato Ecumenico, ha reso nota una valutazione dei delegati ortodossi piena di riserve sulla seconda bozza del documento di lavoro. Von Weizsacker criticò sia l'aspetto teologico che quello organizzativo: "*Perché un'assemblea come quella di Seoul abbia successo, occorrono tre condizioni: 1. che duri quattro mesi (argomenti complessi e differenziati...); 2. che la chiesa cattolica sia coorganizzatrice (sono allora risonanza ed efficacia mondiale...); 3. bisogna trovare un linguaggio nuovo e più efficace*".

- La partecipazione della chiesa cattolica, presente ufficialmente a Seoul solo con 20 osservatori con diritto di parola e non con delegati con diritto di voto. Fu il frutto di una serie di problemi iniziati dall'87, nella fase preparatoria. Scambi di lettere tra il comitato centrale del CEC, che chiedeva alla chiesa cattolica di essere "coinvitante", e il Pontificio Consiglio per la promozione dell'unità dei cristiani, che rispondeva un "no" dovuto essenzialmente alla "diversa natura delle due istituzioni". Tali problemi rivelavano in realtà una serie di divergenze su problemi organizzativi e teologici tra loro concatenati.

Ma, probabilmente, il punto di partenza per tentare un giudizio più ampio e generale sull'Assemblea di Seoul è quello che il Card. Martini disse — parlando di Basilea — che occorre riferirsi ai valori più che ai testi, e che i testi non vanno assolutizzati. Nonostante allora i limiti sottolineati, credo si debba dare all'Assemblea di Seoul un giudizio di fondo positivo. Le chiese, dopo Seoul più che mai, sanno che merito del "processo conciliare" è aver imposto un ordine del giorno alle chiese, nel quale hanno fatto irruzione la lingua e la vita degli uomini. Per la prima volta a Seoul le chiese ed i popoli dei due emisferi, di diversi continenti e di diverse culture, con diverse urgenze e diverse prospettive, hanno potuto confrontarsi. È il cammino dell'ecumenismo.