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

# Director's Desk

From its inception, the Society of the Atonement has been involved with Christian Unity and Ecumenism. In 1908, before entrance into full communion with the Roman Catholic Church, Fr. Paul Wattson initiated and observed the first Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, then known as the Church Unity Octave. This was later changed to the Chair of Unity Octave, and after the II Vatican Council, it became known as the *Week of Prayer for Christian Unity*.

Over 40 years ago, the Friars of the Atonement were invited to become part of the International Association Unitas founded by Fr. Charles Boyer, SJ and located at Piazza Farnese in the Briggittine Convent until 1961 when the Friars moved with the Unitas Association to Via Santa Maria dell' Anima. This move was made possible due to the generosity of Commander Frank and Princess Orietta Doria-Pamphilj to use their Palazzo at Piazza Navona for ecumenical work. After the cessation of the Friars' participation in the work of the Unitas Association in the mid 60's, the late Fr. Thaddeus Horgan presented the leadership of the Franciscan Friars of the Atonement a proposal to continue their ecumenical presence in Rome by establishing an Ecumenical Center, the **Centro Pro Unione** at Via Santa Maria dell' Anima. The Centro was opened 25 years ago in 1968.

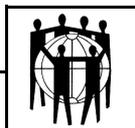
It is with pride that we offer our readers the texts of the conferences given during our 25th anniversary celebrations. Unfortunately one of our speakers, Dr. Günther Gaßmann was unable to join us due to his health. Dr. Thomas Best graciously filled in for him at the last minute. Due to this fact we do not have a manuscript for Dr. Best's talk. We wish to thank all of you who sent best wishes for this event.

The anniversary celebration was also a joyous occasion for marking the progress made in the library. Sr. Mary Peter Froelicher with the aid of Dr. Barbara Bergami and Mrs. Olga Beal completed the computerization of the books and pamphlets (12,174 specialized titles and 171 active periodicals). These are divided by languages: 7,597 in English, 1,551 in German, 1,433 in Italian, 1,419 in French, 105 in Dutch plus holdings in other languages. In addition to this accomplishment, we are continuing with the computerization of the Bibliography of Interchurch and Interconfessional Theological Dialogues.

Our staff grew this year with Sr. Mary Kelly, SA joining Giovanna Berardelli and Paula Turella in our *Pro Unione Ecumenical Gatherings* which welcomes visitors to Rome from other religious traditions. They are most happy to offer a walking tour or slide presentation of interesting ecumenical sites in Rome.

From June 27<sup>th</sup> to July 14<sup>th</sup>, 1994, we will offer a course entitled "Introduction to the Ecumenical & Interreligious Movements from a Roman Catholic Perspective". You will find an informational flyer and registration form enclosed in this issue of the Bulletin. We hope that some of you may be able to join us.

James F. Puglisi, SA  
Director





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Centro Conferences

## The Faith of the Church through the Ages: Ecumenism and Hermeneutics

by

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(Conference given at the **Centro Pro Unione**, Thursday 29 April 1993)

### Introduction

*Twenty five years have passed since the Roman Catholic Church actively involved itself in the network of bilateral and multilateral dialogues. The Centro pro Unione, during this same quarter of a century, has been a most faithful registrar of this work. Through the research of its successive staff members, its bibliographical and educational work it has helped the theologians and church leaders to become acquainted with the ups and downs of the ecumenical journey.*

Nowadays the climate for ecumenical progress seems less favorable: some speak of an ecumenical wintertime or even of the end of ecumenism. The confessional positions seem hardened, the willingness to come to a consensus or to reunion of churches diminishing. But the most important factor in this crisis seems to be the lack of consensus on the hermeneutical key for ecumenical dialogue. What is required and what is sufficient for communion of churches? How much diversity is possible and what kind of consensus is necessary in a future *Una Sancta*? All would agree that unity in faith and love, in prayer and sacramental practice (cf. *UR 3*) are the essential marks of unity. But the concrete criteria for unity in faith find much less agreement<sup>1</sup>. One could easily speak of at least seven Christian

cultures with regard to key criteria for orthodoxy and orthopraxis (in chronological order: Christian-Jewish *halacha* and apostolic *didachè*, *regula fidei* and catechetical tradition,

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than the usual framework of this 'hermeneutics of confessing' suggests. So H. LEGRAND in a recent article on the issue of the 'ordination of women' (H. LEGRAND, "Traditio perpetuo servata? The Non-ordination of Women: Tradition or Simply Historical Fact?", *One in Christ* 29 (1), 1993, pp. 1-23) argues, that the non-ordination of women, although being an age-long canonical custom, cannot claim to be based on Tradition (with a capital T), because it is neither based in Scripture itself nor derived from ecclesiastical practice in the time of the apostles, rather on the contrary. Though I would personally agree with Legrand's conclusions - that the ordination of women should be a matter of open theological debate in the ecumenical movement -, his definition of Tradition - derived from some classical Roman Catholic manuals - seems rather hazardous and not in line with the ecumenical developments since Montreal and Vatican II, as I will try to show in this article. He seems to limit the 'constitutive period' of the church until the death of the last apostle (p. 1). But that would mean, that quite a part of the Christian dogma and institutions could no longer be called to be part of the Christian Tradition, e.g. the Celebration of Easter, the Canon of the Scriptures (!), the threefold ministry, a good deal of sacramental practice etc. It seems wiser, even in this case, to argue, that the church, as a community of faith led by the Holy Spirit, had good reasons, first to accept women for the most important ministries (according to the witness of the New Testament), then to limit this admission to the diaconate and later to close the ministry for women as such. But the church never denied, that women *could* be ordained. This possibility, for good reasons and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, therefore can and should be reopened according to the circumstances of the local churches.

A second example of concrete and far-stretching implications of such hermeneutical pre-decisions we may find in the issue of the authority of the Bible for feminist theology: cf. E.K. WONDRA, "By Whose Authority? The Status of Scripture in Contemporary Feminist Theologies", *The Anglican Theological Review* 75 (1), 1993, pp. 83-101.

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<sup>1</sup> For this field of research, German theology coined the expression "Bekennnishermeutik". It deals with questions such as the relation of the Ancient Creeds to the Old and New Testament's homologies, the functions and inner structure of the Creeds, their relation to later confessions and theological articulations, the relation between 'fides qua creditur' (=confessing) and 'fides quae creditur' (=confession), between orthodoxy and orthopraxis, teaching authority and the 'hierarchia auctoritatum'/'hierarchia veritatum', development of dogma and the problem of continuity and change in the expression of the true 'paradosis of the Gospel'. Cf. *Una Sancta* 40 (1), 1985 (=Report of a Societas Oecumenica Meeting in Rome 1984).

But the actual problems are much more concrete and less formal

conciliar homology and universal reception of creeds and canonical rules of behavior, primatial *determinatio fidei, sola scriptura*, personal experience, historical criticism). All of them meet synchronically at the round table of ecumenical dialogue between churches, but as movements and spiritualities within churches as well. At the same time all of them are questioned by newer forms of contextual 're-reading' of the various traditions in view of the problems of the acculturation of the Christian faith, of secularization-processes or in the framework of interreligious dialogue<sup>2</sup>.

In the midst of the wild waves of such worldwide pluralism and of an increasing polycentricity of the Christian symbolic universe, the ecumenical ship must manoeuvre between the Scylla of fundamentalism at the right - which appeals to an unchanging 'deposit of faith' and to 'magisterial authority' as the only criterion of interpretation of the faith - and the Charybdis of post-modernism at the left, which seems to deny both authoritative teaching and authentic tradition, claiming 'the end of all grand stories' (Lyotard). This delicate position of the Christian ecumenical vessel, in my opinion, cannot be solved by a return to an appeal to divine revelation mediated by *one and unbroken* historical tradition, identical to the deposit of faith safeguarded by the ecclesiastical magisterium of the Roman catholic Church alone, as the newborn Catechism of the Catholic Church might perhaps suggest. Such reaction would be inadequate for two reasons: it would deny all the positive results of ecumenical relations within Christianity thus far, based on the acceptance of *broken traditions* and of a *plurality of traditions* within the one Christian family seeking *koinonia*; and it would not recognize the post-modernist context of the Christian faith, which unlike modernity according to the Enlightenment-project, does not attack the truth of revelation, but the revelation of truth as such.

I will try to explain in this lecture, that the only correct manoeuvre is to keep steadfast to what the preface to the Lima-text called 'the faith of the Church through the ages', or in a slightly different terminology 'the faith once delivered to the saints', as it was quoted from Jude's letter, verse 3 in the preface to the Apostolic Faith Study, both originating from Faith and Order circles. This guideline, however is full of hermeneutical implications: what do we mean by 'the faith of the church through the ages'? And where do we find it?

From the responses to the BEM-document it may be clear, that the churches had considerable difficulty in validating this expression as a kind of hermeneutical criterion. They were not asked to compare the text with their own specific catechisms,

<sup>2</sup> Cf. J. REUMANN, "After Historical Criticism, What? Trends in Biblical Interpretation and Ecumenical, Interfaith Dialogues", *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 29 (1), 1992, pp. 55-86. Reumann analyzes at least six different hermeneutical methods under the one umbrella of literary/narrative methods, which try to compete with the historical critical method: structuralist, social-world, rhetorical, canonical, literary/narrative and reader-oriented (among them semiotic) criticism.

theological handbooks or magisterial teaching, nor with their various 'Denzinger's', but with something seemingly much less solid like 'the faith of the Church through the ages'. What they actually did, apparently, was to strengthen their confessional identities, or, in my terminology, to draw upon their inherited hermeneutical cultures. A process of convergence in faith, sacraments, ministerial service and christian life in view of a more credible 'koinonia' of Christians — the theme of the forthcoming Vth World Conference on Faith and Order in Santiago de Compostella (3-14 August 1993) — seems seriously hindered by a lack of hermeneutical reflection in the ecumenical movement, precisely at a moment of history where it is most badly needed against both pre-modern fundamentalism and post-modern skepticism.

*I will first describe the hermeneutical convergence on the understanding of Tradition in Montreal, Vatican II and the Lima-text on Ministry and then sketch the different hermeneutical positions within the Christian family, as they showed up in the responses to the Lima-text; secondly I will refer to the significance of the modern and post-modern debate within hermeneutical philosophy, illustrated by the different positions of Ebeling, Betti, Gadamer, Derrida and Ricoeur. Finally I will try to elaborate some guidelines for an ecumenical criteriology and a vision for the future of ecumenical dialogue.*

### 1. The 'faith of the church through the ages': from a static 'deposit of faith' towards a 'dynamic transmission of the gospel': Montreal, Vatican II and beyond

The 1963 Montreal Statement on Scripture, Tradition and traditions was, indeed a remarkable point of convergence:

*"Our starting-point is that we are all living in a tradition which goes back to our Lord and has its roots in the Old Testament, and are all indebted to that tradition inasmuch as we have received the revealed truth, the Gospel, through its being transmitted from one generation to another. Thus we can say that we exist as Christians by the Tradition of the Gospel..., testified in Scripture, transmitted in and by the Church through the power of the Holy Spirit. Tradition taken in this sense is actualized in the preaching of the Word, in the administration of the Sacraments and worship, in Christian teaching and theology, and in mission and witness to Christ by the lives of the members of the Church"*<sup>3</sup>.

Likewise, and not independent from the Montreal

<sup>3</sup> Section II, §45, "Scripture, Tradition and Traditions", in: P.C. RODGER & L. VISCHER, eds., *The Fourth World Conference on Faith and Order. Montreal 1963*, NY: Association Press (coll. "Faith and Order Paper", 42), 1964, pp. 52f. Emphasis my own.

theological preparations, where Catholic theologians had already participated, the Second Vatican Council in its Constitution on Divine revelation had stated:

*“In His goodness and wisdom, God, chose to reveal Himself and to make known to us the hidden purpose of His will (cf. Eph. 1:9) by which through Christ, the Word made flesh, man has access to the Father in the Holy Spirit and comes to share in the divine nature (cf. Eph. 2:18; 2 Pet. 1:4). Through this revelation, therefore, the invisible God (cf. Col. 1:15; 1 Tim. 1:17) out of the abundance of His love speaks to men as friends (cf. Ex. 33:11; Jn. 15:14-15) and lives among them (cf. Bar. 3:38), so that He may invite and take them into fellowship with Himself. This plan of revelation is realized by deeds and words having an inner unity: the deeds wrought by God in the history of salvation manifest and confirm the teaching and realities signified by the words, while the words proclaim the deeds and clarify the mystery contained in them”<sup>4</sup>.*

*“God graciously arranged that the things he had once revealed for the salvation of all peoples should remain in their entirety, throughout the ages, and be transmitted to all generations. Therefore, Christ the Lord, in whom the entire Revelation of the most high God is summed up (cf. 2 Cor. 1:20; 3:16—4:6) commanded the apostles to preach the Gospel, which had been promised beforehand by the prophets, and which he fulfilled in his own person and promulgated with his own lips. In preaching the Gospel they were to communicate the gifts of God to all men. This Gospel was to be the source of all saving truth and moral discipline. This was faithfully done: it was done by the apostles who handed on, by the spoken word of their preaching, by the example they gave, by the institutions they established, what they themselves had received—whether from the lips of Christ, from his way of life and his works, or whether they had learned it at the prompting of the Holy Spirit; it was done by those apostles and other men associated with the apostles who, under the inspiration of the same Holy Spirit, committed the message of salvation to writing.*

*“In order that the full and living Gospel might always be preserved in the Church the apostles left bishops as their successors. They gave them ‘their own position of teaching authority’ (Irenaeus). This sacred Tradition, then, and the sacred Scripture of both Testaments, are like a mirror, in which the Church, during its pilgrim journey here on earth, contemplates God, from whom she receives everything, until such time as she is brought to see him face to face as*

*he really is (cf. Jn. 3:2)”<sup>5</sup>.*

These formulations tried to give expression to a common ecumenical conviction about the inner relation between the preceding prophetic and apostolic Tradition, from which the Scriptures emerged and the successive ecclesiastical traditions, which are bound to explain and to proclaim the Tradition of the Gospel, testified in Scripture as the primary instrument of the transmission of the Gospel. So they tried to solve the Reformation and Counter-Reformation dispute on the ‘*Sola Scriptura*’ versus the so-called ‘Two Sources Theory’ of ‘Scripture and Tradition’ as being an addition or sum of two separate tenets of revelation. But at the same time the idea of revelation was corrected from being a mainly rationalistic, cognitive source of supranatural knowledge about things not accessible to human experience (the anti-modernist understanding of revelation e.g. in the encyclical ‘*Pascendi*’). Revelation means an event and a salvation process, reaching from the history of Israel, through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ into the very ecclesial life of Word and Sacrament, Mission and Service of the faithful, being that history the work of the Holy Spirit of God. To quote Montreal once more:

*“What is transmitted in the process of tradition is the Christian faith, not only as a sum of tenets, but as a living reality transmitted through the operation of the Holy Spirit. We can speak of the Christian Tradition (with a capital T), whose content is God’s revelation and self-giving in Christ, present in the life of the Church.*

*“But this Tradition which is the work of the Holy Spirit is embodied in traditions (in the two senses of the word, both as referring to diversity in forms of expression, and in the sense of separate communions). The traditions in Christian history are distinct from, and yet connected with, the Tradition. They are the expressions and manifestations in diverse historical forms of the one truth and reality which is Christ”<sup>6</sup>.*

This high view of the transmission process of the Gospel within the Church through the power of the Holy Spirit, did not solve, however the hermeneutical problem of the relation between Scripture and authoritative ecclesiastical traditions or between those traditions and Tradition (with a capital T, meaning the transmission of the Gospel as a whole, including Scripture). The tension between the diverse and separated ecclesiastical traditions with regard to preaching and teaching, sacraments and ministerial structures, mission and Christian

<sup>4</sup> Second Vatican Council, “Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, *Dei Verbum*”, §2 (W.M. ABBOTT, ed., NY: Herder and Herder/Association Press, 1966, p. 112). Emphasis my own.

<sup>5</sup> *Dei Verbum*, §7, cited from A. FLANNERY, ed., *Vatican Council II. The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, NY: Costello Publ. Co., pp. 753f. Emphasis my own.

<sup>6</sup> Section II, §§46, 47, “Scripture,...”, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

life, all of them appealing to Scripture and Tradition in the sense of Montreal, could not be solved by Montreal. Montreal could go no further than mere juxtaposition of three factors in the transmission process: the preceding events and testimonies leading to Scripture, the Scriptures themselves and the ecclesiastical preaching and teaching.

Likewise the Second Vatican Council, though abandoning the Two Sources Theory, did not answer the question of the *'hierarchy auctoritatum'* between the Scriptures — read in the liturgy, reflected upon in theology, spelled out in Christian life, informing prayer and spirituality — and the Scriptures as interpreted in dogmatic articulations of the faith by the ecclesiastical magisterium. The continuing debate after Vatican II on theological epistemology, on the value of the *consensus fidelium* (LG 12), on the task of the theologians and on the teaching authority of the ecclesiastical magisterium are proof of this lack of clarity and hermeneutical deficit of Vatican II.

Several bilateral dialogues took up the question (ARCIC I, Anglican-Orthodox Dialogue, Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue in the USA), as well as Faith and Order in its multilateral approach. In various studies on the hermeneutical problem (Bristol 1967-Louvain 1971) important insights from church-history were laid bare: the flexibility and frequency of the conciliar praxis of the Early Church and its later developments in East and West, the importance of 'reception' of conciliar decisions by the local churches, the problem of continuity and change, diversity and unity, *consensio antiquitatis et universalitatis* (H. Sieben). In 1976 (Geneva) and 1977 (Odessa) hermeneutical questions came up in the study of the teaching authority of the Church. From Accra 1974 and Nairobi 1975 onwards there developed keen interest in the manifold ways Christians in different contexts lived their faith and found new credal forms of witness (*Giving Account of the Hope within us; Confessing Our Faith Around the World*).

The ongoing debate within Faith and Order resulted in a common conviction, formulated at Bangalore (1978):

*"Before the Church performs acts of teaching, she exists and lives. Her existence and her life are the work of the triune God who calls her into being and sustains her as his people, the Body of Christ, the fellowship of the faithful in the Spirit. The authority of the Church has its ground in this datum of her being. The whole church teaches by what she is, when she is living according to the Gospel.*

*"The Gospel we proclaim is the Gospel of God's free grace. He calls us into his grace which sets us free. Therefore, the authoritative teaching of the Church assumes the form of a joyful witness to God's liberating truth. This truth is its own criterion as it leads us into the glorious liberty of the children of God. We obey the truth because we have been persuaded by it.*

*"The ultimate authority is that of the Holy Spirit who makes Christ present and who shall guide us into all truth.*

*He is at work in all other manifestations of authority in the life of the Church and prevents them from being opposed to each other. The Spirit-given authority of the Church, the Scriptures, the teaching ministry of the Church and the confessional statements are authoritative on the basis of the truth of the Gospel as received by the whole Church. Although conflicts happen, there should be no false alternatives between the Scriptures and the Tradition, the ordained ministry and the laity, the truth of the past and the truth of the present, and the faith of the corporate body of the Church and of the individual person as these dimensions are constitutive elements of the revealed truth of the whole Church"*<sup>7</sup>.

Following that same line of thought, the Preface to BEM in 1982 could state:

*"On the way towards their goal of visible unity, however, the churches will have to pass through various stages. They have been blessed anew through listening to each other and jointly returning to the primary sources, namely 'the Tradition of the Gospel testified in Scripture, transmitted in and by the Church through the power of the Holy Spirit' (Faith and Order World Conference, 1963).*

*"In leaving behind the hostilities of the past, the churches have begun to discover many promising convergences in their shared convictions and perspectives. These convergences give assurance that despite much diversity in theological expression the churches have much in common in their understanding of the faith. The resultant text aims to become part of a faithful and sufficient reflection of the common Christian Tradition on essential elements of Christian communion. In the process of growing together in mutual trust, the churches must develop these doctrinal convergences step by step, until they are finally able to declare together that they are living in communion with one another in continuity with the apostles and the teachings of the universal Church"*<sup>8</sup>.

It was with this theological understanding of a given, common, apostolic Tradition and of a received, partially shared and growing universal Communion, that the first question, put before the churches, was phrased like this:

*"—the extent to which your church can recognize in this text the faith of the church through the ages"*<sup>9</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> Bangalore 1978, *Sharing in One Hope*, Geneva: WCC (coll. "Faith & Order Paper", 92), 1978, p. 258.

<sup>8</sup> *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Geneva: WCC (coll. "Faith & Order Paper" 111), 1982, p. ix. Emphasis my own.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. x.

Its aim was to broaden the scope of the particular teaching of any given tradition towards the wider idea of a common, future-oriented Christian Tradition, from which the divided Churches would draw, through the ecumenical movement, the opportunities for renewal and enrichment in their understanding of Sacraments and Ministry.

The same understanding had led to the description of the main idea of “apostolic Tradition” in §34 and commentary of the Ministry text:

*“In the Creed, the Church confesses itself to be apostolic. The Church lives in continuity with the apostles and their proclamation. The same Lord who sent the apostles continues to be present in the Church. The Spirit keeps the Church in the apostolic tradition until the fulfillment of history in the Kingdom of God. 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”<sup>10</sup>.*

In a similar way a consultation of Faith and Order in Rome 1983 underlined the continuity of the apostolic faith in the life of the church:

*“The term ‘apostolic faith’ (...) does not refer only to a single fixed formula or a specific moment in Christian history. It points to the dynamic, historical (geschichtlich) reality of the central affirmations of the Christian faith which are **grounded** in the witness of the people of the Old Testament and the normative testimony of those who preached Jesus in the earliest days (“apostles”) and of their community, as attested in the New Testament. These central affirmations were further **developed** in the church of the first centuries. This apostolic faith is expressed in various ways, i.e. in individual and common confession of Christians, in preaching and sacraments, in formalized and received credal statements, in decisions of councils and in confessional texts. Ongoing theological explication aims at clarifying this faith as a service to the confessing community. Having its center in the confession of Jesus as Christ and of the triune God, this apostolic faith is to be ever confessed anew and interpreted in the context of changing times and places in continuity with the original witness of the apostolic community and with the faithful*

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

*explication of that witness throughout the centuries”<sup>11</sup>.*

The key words in this understanding of Tradition and apostolic faith, going far beyond the scope of the Montreal hermeneutical debate in its section II on Scripture, Tradition and traditions, refer to the *ecclesial* implications of Tradition:

- apostolic *continuity* (in proclamation, mission, interpretation of the Gospel, celebration of the sacraments, transmission of ministerial responsibilities);
- communion* (sharing in the gifts of God, in prayer, service, unity) and
- fulfillment of history in the Kingdom of God*.

Both the diachronic aspect (continuity in the apostolic faith) and the synchronic meaning (solidarity, reconciliation, unity of the local churches in a universal community) are expressed in the idea of “Tradition” (*paradosis*) and of “Communion” (*koinonia*). In the commentary to §34 of the Lima text on Ministry, the content of this ecclesial Tradition is once more described as a “transmission process”, which relates the actual Church and its ministries to the Gospel and to “the saving words and acts of Jesus Christ which constitute the *life* of the Church”. In the opening paragraphs of the text on Baptism and Eucharist and at many other places in BEM (e.g. in M.1-6, 8-14, 15-16, 19-23) this same basic idea of Tradition as transmission of the salvific *gifts* of Christ in and by the Church through the power of the Holy Spirit has been expressed.

The hermeneutics of BEM imply such a broad and deep understanding of “Tradition”. Both the vocabulary of “continuity” (in manifold expressions like “rooted in”, “delivered”, “received”, “gift”, “continual”, “continue”, “inherit”, “inheritance”), of “community (or “unity”, “solidarity”, “sharing”, “reconciliation”, “fellowship”) and of “fulfillment in the Kingdom of God” run like a red thread through the texts<sup>12</sup>.

<sup>11</sup> H.-G. LINK, ed., *The Roots of Our Common Faith. Faith in the Scriptures and in the Early Church*, Geneva: WCC (coll. “Faith & Order Paper”, 119), 1984, p. 20.

<sup>12</sup> — “continuity”, e.g. in the Preface ix-x, B. 1-6, 8-10, 19; E. 1-9, 11 (in communion with all the saints and martyrs), 13-14, 19-21, 25 (the Church's participation in God's mission to the world), 29; M. 1-6, 8-12, 15 (the authority of the ordained minister is rooted in Jesus Christ), 19-23, 29 (bishops as ministers of continuity), 34-38 (on apostolic tradition and succession), 39 (ordination: ...to continue the mission of the apostles), 52 (“Churches in ecumenical conversations can recognize their respective ordained ministries if they are mutually assured of their intention to transmit the ministry of Word and sacrament in continuity with apostolic times”), 53 b (“in faithful continuity with the apostolic faith and mission”; “...continuity with the Church of the apostles”); — “community”, e.g. in B. 6, 7, 10, 15; E. 10, 17 (community of the new covenant), 19-21, 26, 29 (connection of the local community with other local communities in the universal church); M. 1-6, 8 (focus of unity), 11 (to assemble and guide the dispersed people of God), 12 (to build up the community in Christ), 13 (to build up the Body of Christ), 21 (episkopè : focus for unity), 23 (to safeguard

By pointing to the Tradition as “*paradosis*”, as a gift to be received and transmitted, the Scriptures being themselves a divine gift of grace to that transmission and reception-process, which is a continuing, future-oriented and even eschatological dynamic and living event, an ecumenical convergence on the hermeneutical problem seemed possible. At the same time such convergence seemed apt to integrate many insights from modern hermeneutical theologies, which emphasize the complex structures of any transmission-process of texts, signs, symbols in context. The results of so-called “critical exegesis” (*Form- und Redaktionsgeschichte*) had already opened up the hermeneutical debate about Scripture and Tradition before Montreal. After Montreal the research about the social, cultural and political contexts of the ministry of Jesus Christ and the life of the Early Church of the New Testament and of the early patristic era, could add new insights about diversity and unity of traditions, creeds, and liturgies of the Early Church. Furthermore, modern semiotic approaches called to our attention the specific functions of the narrative shape of the Jewish and Christian literature.

The ecumenical dialogue itself, is seen as the point, where the hermeneutical process takes place “under the commonly acknowledged authority of God's Word”, as a continuous “re-reading” of the narrative of God's salvation, a continuous re-reception and re-appropriation of the message through the text in its context.

It is thus, not only the exterior texts of Tradition, like the Scriptures or the Creeds or the sacramental forms of the Early Church, but the interior Word of God (Christ incarnated and the Holy life-giving Spirit who work through the Church), which is behind all forms of Tradition. The post-apostolic Tradition, however, in its diverse forms of magisterial teaching with regard to faith and practices of life and worship, is always bound to be a faithful reflection of the apostolic truth and of the continuous intention of faith (*cf.* M. 52). It is “interpretative” and “receptive”, based on apostolic faith as its source, as Bangalore and Vatican II (*DV* 10) had affirmed.

### The responses to BEM

The responses from the churches seem to demonstrate, that such a further theological reading of Montreal, developed

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the unity of the body), 26-27 (communal dimension of ministry), 29 (relate the Christian community in their area to the wider Church, and the universal Church to their community), 34 (unity among the local churches), 38 (unity of the whole Church), 54-55 (overcoming differences, recognition of ministries);

— “fulfillment in the Kingdom of God”, e.g. in B. 3-5, 7, 9-10, 19, 21; E. 1-4, 6-7, 13-14, 17-18, 20, 22-26; M. 1-6, 8, 11, 34 (The Spirit keeps the Church in the apostolic tradition until the fulfillment of history in the Kingdom of God).

within Faith and Order after Salamanca 1973 and Bangalore 1978, could not be taken for granted. Much more intensive reflection on the nature of Tradition, as testified in Scripture, transmitted in and by the Church through the power of the Holy Spirit would have been needed, in order to make all traditions sensitive to the ‘faith of the Church through the ages’.

The official responses to BEM in answering the first question put before them or in making direct remarks on the hermeneutical positions with regard to Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry, as they were supposed to lay behind the BEM-texts, reflect roughly seven possible positions after Montreal:

a. — “the faith of the church through the ages” is interpreted as synonymous with the dynamic idea of “Tradition” according to the description of Montreal, including the faith of Israel as witnessed in the Old Testament; it is the initiative of God's grace in *the history of salvation*, the Gospel as the foundation of faith in every age<sup>13</sup>. As the New Testament is a ‘re-reading’

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<sup>13</sup> M. THURIAN, ed., *Churches Respond to BEM. Official Responses to “Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry” Text*, Geneva: WCC, 1986-1988, vols. I-VI.

I, 90—Church of Scotland; I, 123—Inter-orthodox symposium; II, 10—Russian Orthodox Church: “*The faith of the church through the ages contained the fullness of the apostolic tradition preserved and witnessed by the church in its teaching, conciliar experience, liturgical-sacramental devotion, gracious holiness of the life and teaching of its holy martyrs, confessors, fathers and doctors*”; II, 25—Finnish Orthodox Church; II, 58—Episcopal Church USA; II, 180—United Methodist Church USA; III, 32.55—Church of England (affirming M. §34: “*to be apostolic is necessarily to share in the great mission to which the Church is called and also to abide in the fellowship of the unity of God's universal Church. Such a succession in a historic community preserving down the ages its distinctive life of faith and love points, we believe, to the faith of the church through the ages*”; IV, 58—Evangelical Lutheran Church of Iceland: “*...it signifies the continuity of the Christian faith which manifests itself in more than one way in the lives of the different churches. In the first question we were asked whether we find in the text an interpretation of the witness of the New Testament and the common Christian tradition, both of which are the basis under the tradition we have preserved*”; IV, 184-190—Burma Baptist Convention; V, 5—Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church: “*The church is built on the foundation of Jesus Christ, with the apostles and prophets, martyrs and saints built into the structure. The church as the body of Christ who is its head includes Christ himself. If Christ is regarded as somehow standing apart from the church, commissioning it, the meaning of the ministry would be misunderstood. The mystery of the church in which God in Christ incorporates us sinners into the very person of Christ cannot be grasped merely as a commission or as a function. The church is also a presence, the very presence of God in Christ. The ministry becomes recognizable only where the church is experienced as a divine-human presence and comprising of Christ and previous generations of Christians*”; V, 8—Old Catholic Church of Switzerland: “*‘historical continuity of the faith’ over against ‘ahistorical immediacy to the New Testament’*”; V, 18—Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Kingdom of the Netherlands: “*We do not regard points of theological discussion and differences of opinion as a*

(*relecture*) of the Old, so ongoing teaching and preaching is a continuous 're-reading' of God's saving action in history.

b. — “the faith of the church through the ages” is seen as “apostolic faith”, i.e. the faith of *the eye-witnesses and their direct successors in the constitutive period of the Church* (which might end on a rather varying date from 150—787 C.E.)<sup>14</sup>. In this view, every tradition must be measured by the content of the original ‘*regula fidei*’ (Irenaeus, Tertullian), by the Ancient Creeds, by a so-called ‘*consensus quinquesaecularis*’ or by the formal criterion of the canonical authority of the Ecumenical Councils of the ‘undivided church’.

c. — “the faith of the church through the ages” is *the apostolic faith, as attested in the Scriptures, especially in the New Testament*<sup>15</sup>. Against all later aberrations and inventions, some

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*breach of unity in Christ, as this unity does not depend on our beliefs but on him who alone is the guarantee of our unity. This is emphasized by the authority — repeatedly stressed below — of the self-impacting word of God, which is always subject in relation to other ‘instruments’ which it uses for the ministerium verbi”;* *ibid.*, p. 19: “*simultaneity of the ages under the single word of God...we have been brought into the history of Abraham*”.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 6—Russian Orthodox Church; II, 13.14.15.21—Bulgarian Orthodox Church; III, 9.13—Rumanian Orthodox Church; IV, 6—Ecumenical Patriarchate.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 132—Lutheran Church Missouri Synod; III, 143—Standing Council of the Lutheran and Reformed Churches of France; III, 147—Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession of Alsace and Lorraine; III, 163—Reformed Church of France; III, 168—United Protestant Church of Belgium; II, 185—Presbyterian Church of Rwanda: “*The Bible can unite us, whereas tradition disunites*”; III, 214—Presbyterian Church in Ireland: “*Concerns about historical-liturgical-devotional continuity prevail over the demands of Biblical authenticity. The ecclesiastical situation prevails over exegesis*”; *ibid.*, III, 215: “*The position of our Church is that the sole authority for faith and life is Holy Scripture and that all subsequent traditions within the Church are subject to this norm and criterion...Indeed it seems as if tradition has the primary place*”; III, 247—Baptist Union of Denmark: “*We recognize in the document ‘the faith of the Church throughout the ages’ though we find this expression more a description of the creative power of the ecclesiastical tradition than the norm of confession which alone can be found in the canonical scriptures*”; III, 280—Union of Welsh Independents: “*As we understand it, the ‘apostolic tradition’ is precisely the contents of the New Testament*”; IV, 17—Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession (Austria): “*the priority of the Bible is limited*”; IV, 47—Evangelical Lutheran Church of Hannover: “*We cannot but refer to the witness of the scriptures*”; IV, 128—Evangelical Church in Hessen and Nassau: “*the word of God, as testified in the holy scriptures, is the cognitive basis of theology and of the church*”; IV, 167—Evangelical Methodist Church: Central Conference in the GDR; IV, 174—Evangelical Methodist Church, Central Conference in FRG; IV, 191—Union of Evangelical Free Churches in the GDR (Baptists); V, 34—Evangelical Church in Baden; V, 163—Reformed Church in

(mitigated) form of a ‘*sola scriptura*’ principle must be maintained, making renewal, purification and reformation (*ecclesia semper purificanda*) possible.

d. — “the faith of the church through the ages” is “*faith according to the Scriptures*”, as it was explicated by later confessions of faith or catechisms, in their time considered to be faithful to the Scriptures and being in that sense ‘foundational’ for the faith<sup>16</sup>.

e. — “the faith of the church through the ages” is *the apostolic faith as received in one particular tradition, and as being mediated through the actual authoritative teaching of that*

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Hungary: “*We can in no way dispense with the clear expression of the fact that the living word of God, viva vox Dei, made flesh in Jesus Christ, written down in the scriptures and explained by the Holy Spirit (John 14:26), is above all church traditions and is their criterion at all times. We attach great importance to the assertion of the biblical teaching that the church was called to existence by the word of God, therefore the church can only be a blessed instrument of God as a creatura verbi*”; VI, 67—Evangelical Church in Berlin-Brandenburg, “*but recognizing apostolic tradition as a standard by which we have to test e.g. the structures of ministry*”; VI, 69—Church of Lippe and p. 74: “*that to the Lima texts at hand a further declaration of convergence entitled De evangelio be added or rather be placed in front of it. It should discuss gospel-scripture-Tradition, Spirit and word, mission and evangelization and ministerium verbi divini...*”; VI, 124—United German Mennonite Congregations.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 108—The Church of Norway; IV, 24.26—Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria; IV, 45—Estonian Evangelical Lutheran Church; IV, 74—Evangelical Lutheran Church in Oldenburg; IV, 82—Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession in Romania; IV, 138.148-149—Evangelical Church of Westphalia: “*the basis for our response is the question of the extent to which the biblical witness and the fundamental concern of the Reformation confessions as well as the latter’s historical impact find expression*”; IV, 230.250.253—The Salvation Army: “*We cannot give to apostolic or any tradition the same value as to the scriptures or make the scriptures depend on tradition*” (253), but also: “*Gradually but positively there emerged that conviction which salvationists cherish to this day, that the Holy Spirit was confirming this new expression of Christian faith and practice...which included the non-observance of the traditional sacraments on theological as well as practical grounds*” (230); V, 23—Evangelical Lutheran Church in Württemberg (but affirming M. §34 p. 29); V, 95—Evangelical Church of Kurhessen-Waldeck; V, 121—Federation of the Evangelical Churches in the GDR, but, p. 121.123: “*...today it is in shared ecumenical discussion with other churches and their traditions that we can discern the renewing word of God in holy scripture*” and p. 147: “*the convergence statements have given our Reformation tradition new frames of reference*”; V, 157—Mecklenburg; V, 159—Thuringia.

tradition<sup>17</sup>. In such mediation the authority of the Scriptures and of the ongoing Tradition is safeguarded against heretical distortion and subjective selection.

f. — “the faith of the church through the ages” is read as taking shape in the historical “*fides qua creditur*”: the cloud of witnesses, the chain of the confessors and martyrs of the faith, the personal testimony of the believers. Such faith does not adhere to the fixed formulae of the past, it may make free use of many particular expressions of faith, but will recognize the essential pluriformity of all articulations of faith. It is guided by the Holy Spirit, who is the only warrant of Tradition. And it relies on the person of Jesus Christ himself, to whom the faith of the church adheres, but whom it can never define<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, IV, 1—Ecumenical Patriarchate; II, 38—Anglican Church of Canada: (scripture, tradition and reason!), Episcopal Church USA, Church of Melanesia, Church of Norway; V, 70—Evangelical Church of the Rhineland; VI, 7-8—Roman Catholic Church: “According to Catholic teaching (*Dei Verbum* 7-10) sacred Tradition and sacred scripture make up a single sacred deposit of the word of God which is entrusted to the church. They are bound closely together. Sacred scripture is the speech of God as it is put down in writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Tradition transmits in its entirety the word of God which has been entrusted to the apostles by Christ, in whom the entire revelation of God is summed up, and the Holy Spirit. It transmits it to the successors of the apostles, so that, enlightened by the Spirit of truth, they may faithfully preserve, expound and spread it abroad by their preaching. By adhering to it, the church remains always faithful to the teaching of the apostles, and to the gospel of Christ. Thus, in our view there must be a clear distinction made between the apostolic tradition, which obliges us because it is rooted in Revelation, and the various traditions which may develop in local churches”; VI, 50-52—Independent Evangelical Lutheran Church FRG and West Berlin.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 55—Anglican Church of the Southern Cone; III, 101—Church of the Province of Southern Africa; III, 228—All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians-Baptist in the USSR; III, 231.232—Baptist Union of Scotland General; III, 256—Covenanted Baptist Churches in Wales; III, 258-259—American Baptist Churches in the USA; III, 284—Moravian Church in Great Britain and Ireland; III, 296—General Mennonite Society (Netherlands) (but with some strong confessional positions on Baptism of Adult Believers and on aspects of Christian social ethics as normative parts of any common expression of the apostolic faith); III, 297—Quakers of Netherlands; IV, 125-126—Waldensian Evangelical Church of the River Plate: “Why choose the church of the third century as ecclesiological model?”; IV, 211—Baptist Union of Sweden: “*ecclesia semper reformanda*”; IV, 217-219.225—Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Great Britain; V, 168—Evangelical Church of the Congo: “remaining strictly faithful to Jesus Christ as portrayed in the New Testament; VI, 107—Church of the Brethren: “...Christian faith bears the image of its incarnate context as deeply as does ours. We have come to know God enters and is present to other communions and their traditions as powerfully as, but painfully different from God's presence in and claim on our tradition. One gift of ecumenical life has been the ability to see ourselves through the

g. — A seventh group reflects a keen awareness of the modern hermeneutical problems involved in the formulation of the first question: the radical differences of *the historical and actual contexts of Christian homology*, the insights in the historical process of ‘intertextuality’ in the genesis of the scriptures and in the cultural pre-understanding that governs the development of doctrine<sup>19</sup>.

One could indeed, easily speak again of ‘seven Christian cultures’<sup>20</sup> in the understanding of Tradition, each of them originating in certain historical circumstances but nowadays being synchronically present at the round table of dialogue. If one would consider them as mutually exclusive positions, any hope for ecumenical consensus or even convergence would go astray. But are they really mutually exclusive? Do we find them in pure form in any of the churches, as the classical ‘*Konfessionskunde*’ suggested? Is it not the task of ecumenical

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*eyes of other communions. Now we can confess that our human need to define faith and practice normatively is just that: our human need. In scripture, as in the life of believing communities, God did and does not circumscribe to one expression what is the content of faithful belief and practice”; VI, 115—European Continental Province of the Moravian Church; VI, 132—Protestant Church in Sabah (Malaysia); VI, 140—The Theology Committee of the National Council of Churches in Korea.*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, e.g. I, 104—United Reformed Church in the U.K.: “...it is not clear what is meant by ‘the faith of the Church through the ages’ ...Does it refer to the range of belief seen in history, or to some kind of theological core or norm? Is it a criterion by which those who stand within a particular tradition test that tradition, or is it one which people use to test traditions other than their own?...Thus it is not clear why the Spirit might not have been as much at work in the breakdown of the threefold pattern in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as in the creation of it in the second and third. Is not ministry manifold rather than threefold? The question of the criteria for judging which historical developments are to be regarded as theologically significant requires further attention”; II, 124—Church of Sweden; II, 306—Remonstrant Brotherhood: “...we are in fact able to recognize many aspects of what is called here ‘the faith of the Church through the ages’. We do, however, have difficulty with this expression. It creates the impression that faith is timeless and unchanging. We do not deny that tradition and continuity are important factors. But in different periods, cultures and situations new questions are asked and new aspects are emphasized, and consequently faith takes on new forms...The expression ‘the faith of the Church through the ages’ should therefore be used with great caution. The apostolic faith through the ages is not as easy to identify as is suggested”; III, 125—Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland: “there are no general accepted standards of the content of ‘the apostolic faith’”; V, 184—Melanesian Council of Churches; V, 189—National Council of Churches in the Philippines; also, though without questioning its own understanding of apostolic tradition, the Roman Catholic Church: VI, 8.27.32; VI, 77—Swiss Protestant Church Federation.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Efraim SHMUELI, *Seven Jewish Cultures*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.

dialogue to gain common insight in a coherent and reconstructive 'hermeneutics of tradition' (the 'faith once for all entrusted to the saints') and to work for a 'constructive hermeneutics of communion' ('the people of God, led by the Spirit into all truth')?

## 2. The truth in earthen vessels: postmodernist challenges of the ecumenical movement

But is there any serious claim of truth at all? Which tradition could be binding 'through the ages'? When we Christians live from witness and witnesses, depend on time bound stories and narratives, context bound problems and answers to those problems, why then claim any universal truth or value, sense and meaning of the Tradition? Historical skepticism, nihilism and modernist relativism seem to be combined in post-modernist tendencies spreading throughout Europe. Ecumenism seems contaminated by it, when people start to glorify diversity and pluralism and to criticize the dialogue-processes which aimed at convergence and consensus. The appeal to 'fundamental differences', once the favorite tool of anti-ecumenical die-hards, who demanded for more consensus, every time that an important consensus was reached, now seems a toy in the hand of post-ecumenical transconfessionalists, weary of all that useless dialogue endeavor.

The toy is less innocent than it looks. 'Differences' are the epistemological currency of all post-modernist philosophy, art and architecture. Its creed is the Kantian axiom, that reality as such (*das Ding-an-sich*) cannot be known, except through the apriori system of the organization of the human mind. But unlike Kant, they do not accept the system-character of this organization, nor the universal validity of its categories, which, for Kant at least, were still at the basis of a possible scientific metaphysics. No metaphysics whatsoever are possible, neither the classical ones, based on the objective and physical world of nature, history, substance or relations, nor on the subjective and personal world of conscience or apriori categories like those of Descartes and Kant. The subject itself is exploded (Foucault). It was the product of European humanism and this humanism is only one of the great ideologies on European soil, which has produced more victims ('subjects') than masters. The 'subject' of Marx, which was 'the worker,' ended in concentration camps and mass deceit; the subject of Freud, which was the 'Ego' landed in the arms of psychiatrists and their clinics; the bourgeois-subject of the free-market system, which was the 'consumer,' was caught in the 'fatal strategies' (Baudrillard) of commercials and phenomena of over-consumption (traffic-jams, pollution, over-production) in the West and in exploitation and starvation in the so-called Third World. There is no escape for the religious subject, which was the believer, either, because 'God is dead' and secularization is everywhere. Some, like Habermas, who would still defend the idea of the

'subject' and who would object against postmodernist skepticism about the possibility of truth at all, claim, that it was Christianity itself, which caused all these victimizing ideas of the subject. Instead he pleads for 'intersubjectivity' and 'communication' as the only possible source of truth, consensus being essentially based on the procedural rationality of our democratic and always tentative and correctable agreements. Such idea of consensus seems, at the end, not a less skeptical basis of truth than the idea of 'difference' and 'différance' of his adversaries (e.g. Derrida).

To come to grips with the key-concept of 'difference' - but it transcends every form of conceptual systematization - and its consequences for our hermeneutical mode of reflection on 'the faith of the church through the ages', it is worthwhile to sketch in brief the development of philosophical hermeneutics and hermeneutical philosophy in the recent past.

a. It was **Wilhelm Dilthey** (1833-1911) who discovered the fundamental difference between scientific explanation of physical facts and the rational or moral understanding of historical events. Hermeneutics is the specific art of understanding for the moral sciences (= *Geisteswissenschaften*), i.e. for historiography, philosophy, theology and, to a great extent, for the sciences of law, the arts and literature as well.

For theology, wrestling with the critique of modern science on the lack of proof and certainty in its historical and metaphysical assertions, this distinction was a welcome rescue. Then the central sources of all theological argumentation were historical events, delivered in texts were written for *understanding* (*Verstehen*) the nature of God, the world and man, not to *explain* them. But here a new debate split up the newly built hermeneutical community of Christian theology: the relation between *history* and *story*, the event as it happened and as it was reported, in short the fundamental division between reality and the word. The old Kantian schism between the thing as such and the concept of the thing, after the linguistic turn in philosophy, became the schism between word and event. On the basis of existentialist philosophy, Bultmann, Ebeling and Fuchs started to redefine the central Christian Kerygma of Christ incarnated and risen as a Word-Event. What is of import is not the historical Jesus, but the Risen Christ, i.e. the Christ of the Kerygma, who comes to us through the Word of God in the preaching of the Gospel. What really matters is that what happens in the encounter with God through the Word. The object of theological hermeneutics is the word-event as such (Ebeling): "The primary phenomenon in the realm of understanding is not understanding *of* language, but understanding *through* language" (Ebeling, Palmer p. 53). "Hermeneutics in the realm of theology is faith's doctrine of language".

If the word of faith is understood as the mediation of facts only, theology suffers from "historicism" i.e. such interpretation of history that overlooks its story-character. This means a devaluation of the word-event and a neutralization of the

kerygma. It makes tradition into a protocol.

b. In 1962, Emilio Betti reacted against such concentration on the word-event by defending the value of historical objectivity<sup>21</sup>. As an historian of law, Betti wished to maintain a clear distinction - in view of juridical speech, like the plea or the judgement- between the object - e.g. a crime - and the subjective interpretation of it. He accused the German hermeneutical school of confusing interpretation (*Auslegung*) with the making of meaning (*Sinngebung*). The subjectivity of the interpreter - which is indeed unavoidable - must be led by the foreignness and otherness of the object, or the interpretation results in mere projection of the self or in phantasy. The first canon of all interpretation therefore is to affirm the essential autonomy of the object<sup>22</sup>. A second canon refers to the primacy of the over-arching 'context of meaning': not separate words, but whole sentences, not individual sentences but the whole story reveals the truth and is trustworthy. Of course there is also the topicality of meaning—its relation to the interpreter's stance and interests, i.e. his or her pre-understanding. Here he allies with Gadamer and Bultmann. But in order to overcome tautology in the interpretative act and to approach the truth, there must be the sovereignty of given facts or texts or persons from the past, which correct or deepen my pre-understanding. Somehow a concept of 'difference' — between the interpreter and his object of interpretation — is present in Betti's approach as well.

It is clear, that Betti's hermeneutics were very much welcomed by catholic theologians, always looking for the plausibility of historical continuity and objective truth. But others too, like the Käsemann-school of exegesis, and the pre-Montreal preparatory commissions, returned to the objective certainty of historical traditions and the sovereignty of historical facts, e.g. in the New Quest for the historical Jesus. The ecumenical slogan, just before Montreal, coined by Jaroslav Pelikan was: to overcome history by history. Ecumenical dialogue would be able, by profound historical research, to lay bare the sources of historical controversies and misunderstandings and would thus re-write the history of our divisions and pave the way for convergence and mutual, unprejudiced understanding (Outler). The bilateral dialogues, which started immediately after Vatican II, seem to have followed the Betti approach of hermeneutics, with promising results and claims of 'substantial agreement', but without, thus far, any form of official reception.

Apparently a hermeneutics of historical objectivity is not sufficient to restore unity.

c. **Hans-Georg Gadamer** in turn replied to Betti in his

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<sup>21</sup> E. BETTI, *Die Hermeneutik als allgemeine Methode der Geisteswissenschaften*,

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

*Wahrheit und Methode*<sup>23</sup> 1965. Interpretation is not merely an antiquarian effort to enter the world of an author — which is a Romantic idea —, but to span the distance between a text and the present situation. This is true for historiography, but for a lawyer's speech or a theological interpretation as well. Understanding can and does take place without any congeniality with the author, because we relate to the text, not to the author. We adjust and order our own thinking to the text, let it speak but not autonomously, not without our own thinking. In the interpretation-process it is our two horizons — that of the text in its time and that of our pre-understanding at the present, that melt together in what we call interpretation by application. In this 'fusion of horizons', it is the task of hermeneutics "to bring the text out of the alienation in which it finds itself (as fixed, written form), back into the living present of dialogue whose primordial fulfillment is question and answer"<sup>24</sup>. Thereby the text must be placed within the horizon of the question that called it into being (according to R.G. Collingwood, upon whom Gadamer draws heavily here)<sup>25</sup>. Understanding, i.e. the fusion of horizons in the process of tradition, has an ontological basis in language: it is language itself, which makes the encounter of the two horizons possible as a disclosure of our common being and our common world.

No wonder, that Gadamer's hermeneutics influenced modern theological and ecumenical thinking. It was like a singing of angels, making ecumenism the fertile soil of the fusion of horizons between the various traditions, both diachronic and synchronic. Ecumenism, not for the restoration of a romantic past — something like the undivided church —, but for renewal and for fresh common Christian tasks in the world of today. But, as H.G. Stobbe has shown<sup>26</sup>, most supporters of Gadamer's hermeneutic did overlook the fact, that Gadamer's position leads, in the end, to sheer skepticism. He makes the Tradition (e.g. Plato or the Bible) speak, indeed, but without any direction. Meaning ends up in the personal and ever changing application. There is no destiny, no telos. There is never a *better* understanding, there are only *different* understandings<sup>27</sup>. The book of the history of interpretations will remain unfinished and fragmentary. Something like a community of understanding, a narrative community to be led

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<sup>23</sup> Originally published by J.C.B. Mohr (Tübingen), 1960. The work was revised and published in an expanded 5th German ed., *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 1, by the same editor in 1986.

<sup>24</sup> *Wahrheit und methode, op. cit.*, p. 350.

<sup>25</sup> An interesting reception of this view can be found in the 1972 document of 15 Theses on "Theological Pluralism" by the INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION, *Texts & Documents 1969-1985*, San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989, pp. 89-92.

<sup>26</sup> H.G. STOBBE, *Ökumenische Hermeneutik*, 1985.

<sup>27</sup> *Wahrheit und..., op. cit.*, p. 280.

into all truth and hoping for a final disclosure of meaning, seems an illusion. We have only scenario's of the truth and differences between former and later applications, no destiny, no hope. There is truth in the method — i.e. in the way we handle traditions —, but the method cannot lead to any definite truth. We are, in the hermeneutical process, 'emigrants, who will never get home'. We are governed by the laws of 'textuality' and 'contingency', which make possible communication at any time and which further the art of dialogue and conversation, but which do not guide us into lasting communion or to the fulfillment of the truth.

If we would apply Gadamer's hermeneutics to the ecumenical process — as many have done —, we may be convinced of the relativity and the limitations of our divided churches, but would have to give up the ideal of the *Una Sancta*, which lives from 'the faith of the church through the ages'. Dialogue would become a goal in itself; lasting consensus would be out of focus forever.

**d. Jacques Derrida's** deconstructionist philosophy is, according to some of his interpreters<sup>28</sup>, only the consequent application of Gadamer's hermeneutical method. For Derrida, Lyotard and others, the hermeneutical quest for understanding echoes still a certain will of power, a '*vouloir dire*' — which is an illegitimate form of dominion by a 'subject' — or a metaphysical residue, which claims to know something about reality, independent from language and signs. The only reality we have, consists of signs, albeit texts, contexts or pretexts. We are imprisoned in an inscrutable archeological labyrinth of former signification. Nobody knows a way out anymore of this maze of signification, interpretation, application in the world of signs, where we live. Every new interpretation is an arbitrary incision in a process of dissemination. Therefore it is necessary to deconstruct both the reader and the text, to give equal meaning to text, context and pretext and to be aware, that any experience of sense and meaning is a creative, free play with possibilities and differences, and therefore pure 'différence', i.e. further differentiation. The only profit of this game-playing with meaning is the awareness of the openness, the void, the core-character of reality, its gratuitousness. This makes room for all the differences of opinion. And it unmasks all kinds of ideological dominance and oppression. Here post-modernism has its ethical thrust: the end of all grand ideological narratives. It is at the basis of societal pluralism and of an ethics of tolerance. In his recent works Derrida even develops a kind of a negative theology on the basis of this deconstructionist approach: the idea of God is identical with this open character of reality, its limitlessness and inexhaustibility.

To apply Derrida's epistemology to theology and ecumenics would mean, that we would enjoy the diaspora of so many Christian traditions, the coming up of so many newer and independent churches and movements and to foster the

variation of spiritualities and movements within all great religions, including Christianity. (Cf. Taylor): The richness of Christ (*UR 11*) manifested by the many 'differences' within Christianity!

**e.** Against this dissemination of meanings being the ultimate human ethos, other philosophers, like Habermas, Levinas and Ricœur protest vehemently. Especially **Paul Ricœur's** hermeneutical philosophy seems important as a plausible foundation for the continuation and orientation of the ecumenical movement. For Ricœur the process of interpretation and understanding does not so much result in the dissemination of meaning, but on the contrary, in the recollection and harvesting (*receuiller, récollection*) of meaning. This happens through the conflict of interpretations by way of criticism, correction and suspicion, but through composition and configuration as well. Interpretation and hermeneutics are not restricted to texts, but apply to all kinds of symbols, language itself being of the order of symbols. In symbols language and life, *bios* and *logos* meet one another, like in dreams, in prayer, in poetry, in theater, in the art of loving. When not totally formalized, language and texts function in a symbolical way, in the ambiguity of hiding and revealing that which is real. In the interpretation of symbols and texts, we are able to 'grasp' and 'to come to grips' with reality, which nevertheless always surpasses our concepts and methods, our articulations and enunciations. It is life itself ("*la vie opérante*"), which connects our interpretations into a consistent whole.

Meaning and sense, which we recollect, are not the product of our interpretation, like in the work of Derrida or Gadamer, nor are they some sort of objective historical data, like in the approach of Betti. There are no facts without interpretation, nor meaning apart from life. The truth, therefore, can never be found at the level of pure description or reference by words or propositions only. Our grasping of reality is only possible through symbols and through the threefold mimesis of our stories and narratives. The symbols we inherit are themselves based on reality, on the level of pre-figuration (*le symbole donne à penser*); but in our interpretations we work with configurations, which make creative use of the hidden possibilities of the language symbols; the interpretative process aims at application, or re-figuration. Anamnesis of our past — the archeology of the subject — meets in every narrative configuration with destiny and hope — the teleology of the subject. Both archeology and teleology of the person and of the whole of history are completed in the eschatology, which is the heart of religion.

Truth can never be identified with our definitions and propositions, but is revealed through the recollection of all our narrative configurations of it — in covenants, in prophecies, in parables, in sacraments. Participating in history means to share in those narratives, which, at the end will manifest the history of God-self. This certainty is the home of meaning, where we dwell, precisely by making 'homely' and 'coherent' all the

<sup>28</sup> J. GREISCH, *Herméneutique et Grammatologie*, Paris, 1977.

dispersed elements of life.

Ricoeur thinks, that Christianity will reach a second 'naivete', after the shocking but wholesome critical unmasking of its powerstructures by Karl Marx, of its lust-opposing resentful asceticism by Friedrich Nietzsche and its regressive, infantilizing taboo-structures by Sigmund Freud. It will do so by promoting a critical attitude of faith, service, solidarity and peace within a new hermeneutical community, confessing a 'humanism before God' on the basis of a confession of historical and present guilt, failure and sin. Why should not the ecumenical movement be the instrument of Gods 'kairos' for the development of such a post-critical 'Una Sancta'?

It may do so on the basis of its own hermeneutical keys of the past.

### 3. Towards an ecumenical criteriology of 'koinonia': the emergence of a new hermeneutical 'quadrilateral' for ecumenical dialogue

An old memorizing verse, ascribed to Augustin of Denmark (died 1285), summarizes the classical scope of biblical hermeneutics as follows:

*littera gesta docet,  
quid credas allegoria,  
moralis quid agas,  
quo tendas anagogia.*

The literal, allegorical, moral and anagogical senses of the Holy Scripture are a perfect summary of what was meant by 'the faith of the church through the ages'.

This faith is not about the interpretation of a text, nor of customs, practices or institutions. It is about something that happened, an event: *res gesta*. But not an event in the 'natural world', but in the life-world of people. The Holy Scriptures are biographical in nature, from the first Genesis-narrative until the final apotheosis of the blessed ones before the throne of the Lamb. They reflect *res gesta*, they register what happens to people, when they look after God and when God looks after them. So, the registration is not mere description or observation. A biography is never without a certain configuration. What we would call the 'configurative' sense (P. Ricoeur) is what was meant by allegory in the past; our faith lives, not from historical facts, but from biographical events. They do not exist without historical facts, of course, they need their pre-figuration in ordinary, physical and natural life: in birth and pain, in lust and death. But they do not find their meaning in the facts. Their sense and meaning they find in hope and suffering, longing and despair, calling and destiny.

Such meaning is, however, not limited to moments of personal fulfillment or aesthetic satisfaction characteristic for any epos that strikes us. The aim is the re-figuration of personal and societal life in the ethos, the moral sense. All the scriptures

are given to our sanctification and for the discovery of the holy in our fellow human beings.

And finally they invite us to a life according to the will of God and to a life, which finds its '*beatitudo*' in the encounter with God. This is the anagogical sense. It is not limited to the end of our life or of history, but informs and inspires human life from the cradle until the grave, making it thereby human in the strict sense, reflecting our likeness to the image of God, constructing our subjectivity, identity and personality 'before God' (*coram Deo*), receiving our very name and registration in the 'book of life' which is the goal of all scriptures.

Christian faith is not in texts, not in formulations, not in laws or customs, not even in values or meanings, but in God, who makes living persons in His image and likeness; who calls Adam and Noah, Moses and David, Jeremiah and Isaiah, Jesus and the Twelve to be heralds of His glory.

Christian faith is not in christologies or soteriologies, not in messianic expectations or Christocentric utopia's, but in a historical, contingent person, confessed as the Son of God, the Son of Man who judges the living and the dead by his biography as a suffering Servant, but who pleads for us as our advocate at the right hand of God through his resurrection.

Christian faith is not in ecclesiastical institutions or instruments of salvation, nor in moral sanctions on bad behavior at the end, but in the Life-giving Spirit of the Holy God, who through baptism, the communion of the holy and the forgiveness of sins prepares us for a life everlasting in the household of God.

This wonderful coherence of Gods creative, saving and fulfilling presence among us through the Word of God is 'the faith of the church through the ages'.

It is like the four squares of the temple in the heavenly City in the visions of Ezekiel and John's Apocalypse, a true ecumenical Quadrilateral:

- the remembrance of the history of the people of Israel with their God and of the community of the Disciples with Jesus, the eschatological Messenger of God until times everlasting;
- the narrative community of the church, gathered around Word and Sacrament, sign and instrument of the rule and reign of God for this world;
- the praxis of Christian life in mission and service to the world in manifold contexts, bringing hope and joy, justice and peace as marks of the kingdom of God;
- the challenge and destiny of every human person, invited to search for the kingdom of God and to renounce the vicious circles of evil in personal and social life of humanity.

This quadrilateral, sealed by baptism, finds its center, not in the temple, but in the eucharistic koinonia, based on these four characteristics of Christian faith. This eucharistic gathering builds up the church as a communion of churches. They are served and watched by deacons, presbyters and bishops in their midst. Such servants and watchers are not high above the four

sides of the square, but serve in the center, the eucharistic koinonia. Their service is the fidelity and the unity of the community.

Their functions are sacramental and spiritual, not juridical, nor representational nor sacerdotal: all members of the communion of the saints have equal birthrights and free admission to the Holy, in the name of Christ, who opened the entrance to the Most Holy once for all. Therefore all of them are priests of the Holy God, or rather: none of them, then the one Priest they need is present everywhere, where they gather in his name.

Ecumenism has suffered for too long from a one-sided emphasis on the literal sense, the historical *res gesta*. Ecumeni-

cal dialogue looked backwards to the divisions of the past. It did not concentrate enough on the common faith, the moral calling, the final hope which all Christian communities share in spite of their division. The membership of the World Council of Churches of all the Christian World Communions would be the most obvious precondition for the accomplishment of such a task. A vital and coherent Christianity would certainly have something to offer to the world against the seduction of oppressive fundamentalism and permissive skepticism. It would be something like a *Centro pro Unione* and a *Community of Atonement*.



# CC

Centro Conferenze

## L'Œcuménisme et les bibliothèques Un engagement en faveur d'une recherche œcuménique vivante

par

Pierre Beffa

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(Conférence donnée au **Centro Pro Unione** le mardi 26 octobre 1993)

Il est réjouissant qu'aujourd'hui tant de personnes dans le monde s'intéressent à l'œcuménisme. On le doit pour une part à l'activité de très nombreux centres et instituts qui alimentent la flamme de l'espérance œcuménique. Beaucoup de ces centres se sont "encombrés" d'une bibliothèque, j'ai choisi le mot à dessein, car l'expérience apprend que pour de nombreuses institutions, le maintien d'une bibliothèque, comprenant souvent une section d'archives, causa bien des soucis aux responsables. Ainsi, après un début souvent prometteur, des difficultés nombreuses et réelles apparurent qui rendirent impossible la survie même de la bibliothèque. Heureusement, d'autres centres consentirent les très coûteux efforts indispensables au développement de toute bibliothèque, ils s'assurèrent de la présence continue d'un personnel qualifié auquel ils confièrent les indispensables outils techniques s'ouvrant ainsi la seule porte menant vers la réussite, il convient de les en féliciter et de leur dire la reconnaissance des utilisateurs. Ceux-ci ont aujourd'hui à leur disposition dans le monde plusieurs bibliothèques œcuméniques remarquables, dont les responsables ont au cours des années su tisser des liens d'entraide et d'amitié, gage de pérennité et d'amélioration. Toutes ces bibliothèques cependant n'ont été fondées qu'au début des années soixante, voilà qui devrait au moins éveiller l'intérêt quant à leur préhistoire! La bibliothèque de Conseil Œcuménique des Églises à Genève conserve des archives précieuses, je les ai ouvertes et elles m'ont révélé beaucoup d'informations surprenantes.

### Les pionniers de l'œcuménisme: la période avant la deuxième guerre mondiale

Avant la deuxième guerre mondiale, il n'existe dans le monde aucune bibliothèque œcuménique publique, d'ailleurs à cette époque, personne n'aurait pu en donner la définition! Au contraire, presque tous les pionniers de l'œcuménisme avaient constitué leur propre bibliothèque et leurs propres archives, c'était évidemment indispensable à leurs travaux, mais hélas d'un usage

purement privé. On connaît donc l'existence des bibliothèques de Lord Halifax, de l'abbé Portal, du métropolitain Germanos, d'Adolf Keller, d'Elie Gounelle, de Henry-Louis Henriod, etc.. et fait de presque tous les précurseurs, les noms cités n'étant que des exemples. En 1949, Ruth Rouse, co-éditrice avec Stephen Neill de l'histoire du mouvement œcuménique, publie un article dans *The Ecumenical Review* pour présenter la bibliothèque du Conseil Œcuménique et en profite pour lancer un appel pour retrouver la trace et rassembler toutes ces bibliothèques particulières. Hélas, elle parvient déjà à la conclusion que bien que certaines collections aient pu être identifiées et préservées, d'autres ont été dispersées et sont perdues pour toujours!<sup>1</sup>

En plus de ces bibliothèques privées, certaines organisations œcuméniques avaient ouvert une bibliothèque et se donnaient les moyens de préserver leurs archives. D'abord les Alliances universelles des Unions chrétiennes de jeunes Gens et de jeunes Filles, puis la Fédération universelle des Associations chrétiennes d'Étudiants, puis le Conseil Œcuménique du Christianisme pratique, et d'autres, toutes installées à Genève et aujourd'hui disparues, même si ces institutions prennent encore au sérieux leurs responsabilités vis-à-vis de leurs archives, ce qui illustre la difficulté de maintenir une bibliothèque, même de valeur.

Enfin, une étude de Ruth Rouse conservée aux archives<sup>2</sup>, révèle qu'avant la guerre les grandes bibliothèques universitaires n'ont rien à offrir dans le domaine œcuménique. C'est le cas à Oxford comme à Cambridge comme partout, la seule exception étant Bâle.

### La naissance de la bibliothèque du Conseil Œcuménique en 1946

<sup>1</sup> "The Handmaid of the Ecumenical Movement: the World Council's Library", *The Ecumenical Review* 1 (4), 1949, pp. 424-427. L'article, non signé, fut rédigé par Ruth Rouse.

<sup>2</sup> Archives CŒ. Boîte 4207.63

En mai 1946, soit plus de deux ans avant la fondation du Conseil Œcuménique des Églises à Amsterdam en 1948, le Dr. Visser 't Hooft, qui deviendra le premier Secrétaire général de l'organisation, s'active pour constituer une bibliothèque œcuménique qu'il juge indispensable. Il écrit partout. Aux personnes mentionnées plus haut comme aux institutions qui ont préservé leur héritage, aux éditeurs, aux amis du mouvement œcuménique. Il sait le besoin d'un véritable centre de recherches et d'études pour lequel il faut rassembler une riche collection de livres et de documents d'archives<sup>3</sup>. Il y consacre beaucoup d'efforts personnels, il parcourt les catalogues commerciaux des éditeurs, il visite les antiquaires, et de fait, il suivra semaine après semaine le développement de la bibliothèque jusqu'à sa retraite en 1966. Difficile de mieux souligner l'importance qu'elle revêtait à ses yeux! Il part de rien. Ainsi, dans une lettre au Rév. Floyd W. Tomkins, Secrétaire pour l'Amérique du mouvement de Foi et Constitution, il demande qu'on lui envoie la collection complète des *Faith and Order pamphlets*, celui-ci lui répond qu'il n'est pas en possession d'une liste vraiment complète et qu'il va lui envoyer tous les exemplaires qu'il pourra rassembler. Il est amusant de constater qu'il n'y a rien de changé à ce jour où il est toujours aussi difficile de trouver la trace de toutes les éditions et traductions des documents de Foi et Constitution! Nous savons aussi que le Professeur Keller fit don de tous ses ouvrages à Visser 't Hooft, on retrouve même un document de l'entreprise de déménagement Pélichet pour le transport de trois caisses de livres, exemple parfait du document qu'on ne doit jamais conserver dans des archives! Pourtant en 1946, le Dr. Visser 't Hooft peine, et c'est bien normal puisqu'il n'en n'existe pas d'autre, à donner une définition d'une bibliothèque œcuménique. Il semble qu'il veuille privilégier la *konfessionskunde*, c'est à dire la description de la doctrine, de la discipline et de l'organisation des Églises séparées. Tout au long des années, les caractéristiques d'une bibliothèque œcuménique seront précisées, surtout modifiées, selon les évolutions du mouvement lui-même.

En 1949, le Conseil possède le centre de recherches dont les œcuménistes ne peuvent se passer. Nous savons qu'il est bien utilisé par de nombreux lecteurs qui ont à leur disposition plus de 7'000 volumes. L'expérience est désormais acquise, elle permet de fixer les objectifs à atteindre avec clarté. Je cite :

- 1) La bibliothèque devra conserver tous les ouvrages, brochures et périodiques traitant des questions œcuméniques.
- 2) Elle devra fournir au public un service de références bibliographiques et publier ses travaux dans ce domaine.
- 3) Les archives des organismes œcuméniques devront être regroupées à Genève, du moins toutes celles qui ne sont pas déjà hélas perdues, la tâche promet d'être ardue.

Pour l'avenir, elle envisage de s'ouvrir aux domaines suivants: l'ecclésiologie, la symbolique, l'histoire de l'Église, la liturgie, la missiologie. Cette ouverture s'avérera par la suite problématique, on peut noter au passage que les sciences

bibliques sont absentes<sup>4</sup>.

Dans cette contribution, je voudrais éviter de m'appesantir sur les questions techniques ou de métier, pourtant il en est une qui revient toujours: comment classer les livres d'une collection spécialisée dans l'œcuménisme? Dans les années quarante, les bibliothécaires n'avaient que peu d'instruments à leur disposition. A l'époque, choisir la classification universelle de Bruxelles (CDU) pouvait être considéré comme une solution moderne et assurée, elle fut adoptée pour la bibliothèque du Conseil à Genève. Après quelques mois ou quelques années, cette classification fut critiquée, certains, Visser 't Hooft?, la jugeait "trop catholique". La décision fut prise de passer à la classification décimale de Dewey, techniquement ce n'était pas trop difficile, et d'utiliser d'abord la 14e, puis la 16e édition de cette classification (DDC). Pour le rangement des livres sur les rayons, nous avons conservé ce système jusqu'à ce jour, mais ma fréquentation quotidienne de l'œuvre de Melvil Dewey pendant 28 ans ne m'a pas persuadé qu'il ait été un théologien de génie!

Fort heureusement, la bibliothèque œcuménique de Genève n'est pas restée longtemps la seule de son espèce. A la même époque au "Union Theological Seminary" de New York s'ouvrait la "William Adams Brown Ecumenical Library". Immédiatement, les deux institutions vont collaborer de bien des manières et vont se ressembler étrangement. L'échange fréquent de correspondance va se poursuivre jusqu'à ce que la terrible décision de fermer cette bibliothèque très riche ne tombe au début des années soixante-dix pour des raisons financières. Ce furent presque vingt années de travail qui furent anéanties. La situation avait changé, les bibliothèques des facultés de théologie possédaient maintenant des sections œcuméniques jugées suffisantes pour satisfaire les besoins des étudiants.

En 1946 aussi fut fondé près de Genève l'Institut de Bossey, dépendant du CŒ, en vue de la formation des futurs responsables œcuméniques dont les Églises auraient besoin<sup>5</sup>. Un don permit la construction d'une salle de conférences et d'une bibliothèque. Celle-ci devint pour ainsi dire la sœur de celle de Genève, et même la grande sœur car son développement fut plus rapide pour atteindre les 20'000 ouvrages. Elle découvrit sa spécificité en privilégiant les sciences bibliques et l'orthodoxie. Sa situation bucolique sur les bords d'un charmant ruisseau lui valut d'être inondée par trois fois, et de perdre ainsi des collections uniques. Elle est maintenant unie à la bibliothèque de Genève en une seule administration pour former, disons en paraphrasant monsieur Mitterand, une très grande bibliothèque œcuménique, servie par le même ordinateur.

#### **La Consultation des Directeurs des Instituts œcuméniques, Bossey, Juin 1970**

<sup>4</sup> "The Handmaid of the Ecumenical Movement", *op. cit.*

<sup>5</sup> P.A. CROW, ed., *Bossey: Two Vignettes from the Early Years*, Bossey: Institut œcuménique, 1981.

<sup>3</sup> Archives CŒ. Boîte 4207.01

Osons un grand saut dans le temps pour nous retrouver à Bossey au mois de juin 1970 pour prendre la mesure d'une situation toute nouvelle. Après les assemblées de la Nouvelle-Delhi en 1961, de Genève en 1966, et d'Upsal en 1968, surtout après la conclusion du deuxième concile du Vatican, le mouvement œcuménique, devenu extrêmement cher au peuple de Dieu, semblait progresser presque chaque jour. La recherche théologique œcuménique en pleine vigueur s'ouvrait continuellement de nouveaux champs, et la qualité des résultats obtenus était telle qu'elle ne sera plus égalée avant longtemps. Ceci est dû pour une large part à l'activité des Instituts œcuméniques apparus un peu partout dans le monde. Pour sortir de leur isolement, les directeurs se rencontrèrent une première fois à Bossey en juin 1970, pour se connaître et échanger d'utiles informations. Ils avaient aussi pensé à établir un programme parallèle pour leurs bibliothécaires, et ce n'est pas moins de 51 bibliothèques œcuméniques qui purent ainsi entrer en contact, se découvrir les unes les autres, et initier une collaboration exemplaire en ce sens qu'elle resta toujours libre, modeste, pas institutionnalisée, dominée par personne, caractérisée par l'esprit de service, d'échange et de don. Ces 51 bibliothèques se définissent elles-mêmes comme œcuméniques, mais avec des nuances enrichissantes. Ainsi à l'époque, l'on considérait œcuménique un ouvrage écrit sur Luther par un catholique, de même un article d'un méthodiste sur le concile Vatican II. Aujourd'hui, la nécessité d'être plus spécifique conduirait à pratiquer un discernement plus rigoureux. Un livre sur Luther est simplement un livre sur Luther, peu importe la confession de l'auteur. C'est une simple illustration des changements de perception selon les temps et les lieux.

Il est impossible de présenter les 51 bibliothèques dans le cadre de cette contribution<sup>6</sup>, il faut se limiter à quelques exemples.

1) La bibliothèque du Centre d'œcuménisme à Montréal. Fondée en 1963, elle compte en 1970 deux cents volumes, et reçoit 75 périodiques. Son accroissement annuel est de 300 titres. Elle est parfaitement représentative de la majorité des bibliothèques œcuméniques. Elle utilise la classification du Conseil Œcuménique<sup>7</sup>.

2) La bibliothèque du Centre "Unité chrétienne" à Lyon, intéressante car elle a hérité des livres et des papiers de l'abbé Couturier, l'un des pionniers, et qu'il ne faut pas confondre avec celle, beaucoup plus riche, du centre Saint Irénée.

3) Les bibliothèques des Instituts œcuméniques des universités de Tübingen, Münster, Paderborn, Bensheim, Heidelberg etc.. toutes en plein développement en 1970.

4) La bibliothèque du "Centro Pro Unione" à Rome. Fondée en 1968, elle renferme en 1970 déjà 3837 livres et l'accroissement constant de ses collections va l'établir meilleure

bibliothèque œcuménique de Rome. Les rapports entre cette bibliothèque et celle du Conseil Œcuménique seront extrêmement chaleureux tout au long des années. D'une certaine manière, on peut les décrire comme deux jumelles, qui utilisent la même classification, et qui établissent des liaisons informatiques fonctionnant très bien compte tenu des différences des systèmes utilisés.

Faute de place, j'interromps ici la description des bibliothèques représentées à Bossey et j'essaie d'illustrer par quelques exemples les divers types de collaboration qui ont pu fonctionner. Tous les professionnels qui ont eu à gérer une collection œcuménique le savent, les problèmes de classification peuvent devenir lancinants. Mon prédécesseur comme directeur de la bibliothèque du Conseil Œcuménique des Églises, le pasteur Ans J. van der Bent, s'est employé à résoudre ce problème. Il a proposé une classification pour tout le champ œcuménique qu'il a réussi à maintenir intégralement dans le système de Dewey et sans interférer avec celui-ci en utilisant l'espace disponible après la cote 280.1. Il a publié son travail dans l'annuaire de l'ATLA (American Theological Library Association)<sup>8</sup>. Beaucoup d'instituts ont adopté ou se sont inspiré de cette classification qui constitue un lien simple mais important entre eux. J'ai moi-même revu cette classification à plusieurs reprises pour tenir compte des variations structurelles fréquentes du Conseil Œcuménique qui ont mystifié plus d'un bibliothécaire<sup>9</sup>. J'ignore combien de bibliothèques dans le monde l'utilisent, elles sont probablement assez nombreuses.

Les éditeurs de la *IOB (Internationale ökumenische Bibliographie)* ont participé activement à la consultation de Bossey. Ils venaient de faire paraître le volume 3/4, et devant l'ampleur de l'entreprise, ils proposèrent aux bibliothèques œcuméniques de collaborer, ce qui fut accepté par plusieurs en considération de la haute valeur scientifique du projet. Les recensions des articles de périodiques furent rédigées plus rapidement, et pour contourner l'obstacle de longs délais de parution, un système d'échanges de fiches fut organisé par l'institut du Dr. A.J. Bronkhorst à Utrecht qui se révéla fort utile. Ces fiches utilisaient un carton vraiment très épais, de sorte que certains bibliothécaires parlaient volontiers de planches! Toute cette documentation bibliographique était ensuite reprise dans la *IOB*<sup>10</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> A.J. van der BENT, "Update on Ecumenical Documentation: World Council of Churches Library Classification", *American Theological Library Association*, 30th Annual conference, 1976, pp. 81-104.

<sup>9</sup> P. BEFFA, *World Council of Churches Library Classification: Ecumenical Section*, November 1992. Disponible à la bibliothèque du CŒ.

<sup>10</sup> *Internationale ökumenische Bibliographie = International Ecumenical Bibliography = Bibliographie Œcuménique Internationale = Bibliografía Ecueménica Internacional*. München: Kaiser, 1967-1992. - v. 1/2 (1962/63) - v. 17/18 (1978/79).

<sup>6</sup> Archives CŒ. Boîte 4207.66

<sup>7</sup> J. CHABOT, "La bibliothèque au service de l'œcuménisme", *Œcuménisme '70 : bulletin d'information*, (21), mai 1970.

Il est apparu évident aux participants que tous les instituts ne pouvaient pas et ne devaient pas faire la même chose, que chacun avait sa spécificité, l'essentiel étant de communiquer aux autres les résultats de ses travaux. Le Centro Pro Unione accepta la responsabilité de documenter bibliographiquement les dialogues interconfessionnels bilatéraux et multilatéraux. La première publication fut disponible en 1978, elle continue régulièrement<sup>11</sup>. Son avenir est évidemment lié à celui des dialogues eux-mêmes! Aussi longtemps qu'ils dureront, les œcuménistes disposeront d'un outil de travail précieux et facile à obtenir en maints endroits.

Favoriser la recherche fondamentale, promouvoir la rédaction de thèses de doctorat, voilà un rôle qui convient à la majorité des instituts universitaires, pourvu qu'une concertation s'établisse. La bibliothèque de Genève a endossé cette responsabilité et en 1977, Ans van der Bent a publié un guide des thèses en œcuménisme<sup>12</sup>. Il en existe plusieurs centaines et il est souvent difficile de les localiser.

Voilà, parmi d'autres, quelques résultats obtenus lors d'une consultation qui avait été soigneusement préparée. Elle eut des suites. Plus tard, fut fondée la "Societas œcumenica" qui rassemble en gros les mêmes instituts. Il est toutefois regrettable que la "Societas Œcumenica" qui organise fidèlement tous les deux ans une consultation scientifique, n'ait plus jamais invité les bibliothécaires. Ils auraient pourtant du travail à entreprendre en commun, eux qui sont confrontés à une situation de nouveau toute différente après la généralisation de l'emploi de l'outil informatique.

### Quelle est la situation des bibliothèques œcuméniques avant le XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle?

Aujourd'hui, le mot œcuménique est employé dans tous les contextes. Exemple: "on a assisté hier à une réunion œcuménique entre tous les chefs des principaux courants de la majorité parlementaire", ce qui prouve que le concept est largement adopté. Il a aussi perdu l'éclat de la nouveauté et un peu de son caractère dynamique. Lors de mes derniers voyages en Europe occidentale, en visitant des bibliothèques universitaires, j'ai pu me persuader que la plupart possèdent des collections œcuméniques suffisantes pour les utilisateurs habituels dans le cadre des études supérieures. Je l'ai remarqué à Louvain, à Salamanque, à Strasbourg, à Fribourg, en Allemagne, en Angleterre. Cela entraîne comme conséquence qu'un large potentiel d'utilisateurs est retiré purement et simplement aux bibliothèques œcuméniques. Il faut s'en réjouir. D'autre part, les

<sup>11</sup> J. PUGLISI, *A Workbook of Bibliographies for the Study of Interchurch Dialogues*, Rome: Centro Pro Unione, 1978. Se continue.

<sup>12</sup> A.J. van der BENT, *Doctoral Dissertations on Ecumenical Themes: A Guide for Teachers and Students*, Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1977.

nouveaux étudiants en théologie appartiennent à une génération avide de certitude et peu encline aux risques du dialogue et de la vulnérabilité et sont moins attirés dans le choix des sujets de thèse par la problématique œcuménique. Il convient de s'en lamenter, même si cela ne sert à rien. Le mouvement œcuménique a cent ans, c'est un grand âge pour un mouvement. Il a son histoire, fascinante, il a influencé l'histoire à plus d'une reprise, il fait partie de l'histoire des peuples du XX<sup>e</sup> siècle, c'est un fait que nul ne peut ignorer. Plus d'une bibliothèque œcuménique renferme des documents uniques et précieux, des témoignages historiques, qu'elle a l'obligation morale de préserver. De toute façon, dans toutes nos bibliothèques se trouve une telle richesse de pensée et de réflexion, c'est là que réside la mémoire de l'œcuménisme, qu'elles n'ont pas à justifier leur existence. Grâce à Dieu, elles sont là, et tout doit être fait pour les entretenir et leur éviter le destin fâcheux que connurent certaines d'entre-elles comme on l'a rappelé dans cet essai. Les spécificités qui sont les leurs, et leur capacités à se moderniser pour rendre le meilleur service à de nouvelles générations d'utilisateurs, moins nombreuses mais avides de connaissances, sont les gages d'un avenir fécond.

Je voudrais encore brièvement exposer l'évolution qu'a connue la bibliothèque du Conseil Œcuménique des Églises à Genève, et dire comment elle parvient encore à satisfaire ses utilisateurs et à collaborer avec un nombre toujours croissant de bibliothèques dans le monde.

Le cœur de la bibliothèque et sa vraie raison d'être, se sont les archives. On a pu regrouper à Genève plusieurs fonds grands ou petits. Pour mesurer l'étendue du travail, il suffit de mentionner les 1'200 mètres linéaires qu'occupent actuellement les 12'000 boîtes d'archives historiques. Elles ont été très décrites par Ans van der Bent dans deux articles parus dans *The Ecumenical Review*<sup>13</sup> qui restent encore d'actualité.

Pour le directeur de la bibliothèque et pour l'archiviste, ces archives sont la source d'une légitime fierté à cause de leur valeur proprement inestimable, et de graves soucis. En effet, leur support est généralement constitué par du papier de très mauvaise qualité qui inexorablement se détruit lui-même. On peut prédire la fin définitive de certains fonds pour dans quarante ans au plus tard. La prise de conscience de ce fait est intervenue, comme dans d'autres bibliothèques, au début des années 1980.

En 1987, avec mes collègues, nous avons réorganisé le travail dans la bibliothèque, afin de permettre l'engagement d'un archiviste professionnel, à l'occasion d'un départ à la retraite, une première absolue au Conseil Œcuménique. Ainsi, sans apport financier nouveau, nous avons commencé une action modeste mais décisive, en vue de la sauvegarde de nos archives. Nous nous sommes dotés de bons moyens techniques, tels que l'emploi

<sup>13</sup> A.J. van der BENT, "Treasures in the World Council of Churches Library in Geneva", *The Ecumenical Review* 22 (2), 1970, pp. 146-162 et *ID.*, "Historia Œcumenica: Three Million Documents in the Archives of the Ecumenical Centre Library", *The Ecumenical Review* 35 (3), 1983, pp. 323-334.

de boîtes et de dossiers en carton et en papier déacidifiés, qui sont à même de ralentir la maladie, et parfois de restaurer un peu les documents les moins atteints. Nous avons progressé dans l'indexation et le catalogage par ordinateur de plusieurs fonds, car c'est la condition indispensable à la préservation sur microfiches, sur microfilms, ou sur d'autres supports comme les CD-ROM. Actuellement, environ 18% des archives sont indexées et 10% sont préservées sur microfiches et disponibles chez I.D.C. à Leiden. Mais c'est abondamment clair qu'avec les forces dont nous disposons actuellement, nous ne finirons jamais et que nous ne préserverons pas la totalité de nos archives. Ceci est très angoissant car l'œcuménisme est sans nul doute un grand mouvement de la pensée du XXe siècle, et nous avons le devoir de transmettre les témoignages originaux aux chercheurs qui nous suivront. Toutefois, en travaillant sérieusement et en recevant une très nécessaire aide nous pourrons, section après section, protéger le magnifique héritage légué par les générations précédentes.

Tout ce que nous avons dit concernant les archives ne doit pas faire oublier le très grand travail de gestion que constitue une bibliothèque de 100'000 volumes. En 1986, nous avons commencé l'informatisation de nos catalogues. Toutes les nouvelles acquisitions sont entrées directement dans l'ordinateur, et de plus un travail intensif de reprise des anciennes cartes nous permet d'avoir accès sur l'écran à 45'000 notices. Ceci constitue un progrès décisif pour nos lecteurs, qui ont à leur disposition un outil de travail très performant, multilingue et pourtant simple d'utilisation. Nos lecteurs viennent du monde entier, ce sont des spécialistes qui ne trouvent les livres et les documents qui leur sont nécessaire qu'à Genève. Pour faciliter le travail des chercheurs, nous avons fait en sorte que notre banque de donnée sur ordinateur, qui contient les notices bibliographiques se rapportant à nos livres et à nos archives, puisse être interrogée de partout dans le monde. Plusieurs centres et instituts le font

régulièrement comme le "Centro Pro Unione" montrant ainsi la voie à de nouvelles formes de collaboration. Nous avons publié deux brochures de la *WCC Library Series*<sup>14</sup> pour faciliter l'utilisation de notre ordinateur. Mais dans ce domaine, la technologie évolue très rapidement et nous avons des projets communs avec le Service informatique du Cœ pour être encore plus efficace. Car ce qu'il faut maintenant, c'est étendre la collaboration au monde entier et non plus simplement à l'Europe. Nous la pratiquons déjà. La nouvelle définition d'une bibliothèque œcuménique privilégie les aspects multilingues et pluri-culturels, elle valorise la contribution des femmes. Ce n'est pas céder au goût du jour, c'est une fois encore offrir la possibilité d'une recherche et d'un débat sérieux. Très peu partisant des structures formelles et lourdes, j'aime le style d'entraide simple et efficace des bibliothèques œcuméniques. Dans plusieurs pays, il existe des associations de bibliothécaires de théologie, elles revêtent partout un caractère œcuménique. Elles sont regroupées au sein d'un Conseil international des Associations de Bibliothèques théologiques<sup>15</sup>. Nous avons donc les organismes nécessaires. Par notre participation, nous contribuons à leur donner un peu de vigueur supplémentaire et nous renforçons aussi nos liens d'amitié. C'est donc avec espoir que j'envisage l'avenir.

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<sup>14</sup> P. BEFFA, *Manual to Facilitate Bibliographical Research through the Direct Enquiry System of the Library of the World Council of Churches*, Geneva: World Council of Churches (coll. "WCC library series", 1), 1989 et *ID.*, *List of Main Subject Headings (provisional)*, Geneva: World Council of Churches (coll. "WCC library series", 2), 1991.

<sup>15</sup> *Conseil international des associations de bibliothèques de théologie, 1961-1990*, Leuven: Bibliotheek van de Faculteit de Godgeleerdheid van de K.U. Leuven, 1990.



# CC

Centro Conferenze

## La forza della Parola nel cammino ecumenico

da

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### La parola è speranza

La Parola di Dio, posta di fronte all'avventura dell'uomo ed anche a quella avventura così delicata della Chiesa che si chiama Movimento Ecumenico, diventa un punto di forza. Questo dal passato, attraverso la memoria, si proietta nel futuro per farsi speranza. Infatti se è vero che "speranza" è il futuro dell'amore, la Parola di Dio, quale messaggio attuale del Suo amore, diventa un "futuro" di speranza. Anche nella avventura della "unità" dei Cristiani, perciò, la Parola sarà la protagonista del cammino verso l'incontro.

Il passato della Parola di Dio è la documentazione della capacità della Parola di dare inizio dal nulla: dal nulla dell'esistere, perché: per la Parola di Dio tutte le cose sono state fatte, nell'uomo svuotato e compromesso ad un certo momento la "Parola di Dio" appare salvante piena di amore e di verità; sugli apostoli sconvolti, nascosti, paurosi e dispersi lo Spirito Santo richiama la Parola di Dio, la completa e nasce la Chiesa, quel fermento e quella speranza che non solo sarà di unità dei Cristiani ma fermento di unità di tutto il genere umano. Perché allora non dovremmo pensare che proprio questa Parola di Dio, che sta ad ogni inizio, che supera le barriere del nulla, del peccato e delle fratture non debba essere proprio ancora essa a ricreare l'unità fra i cristiani?

Perché la Parola di Dio non potrebbe essere la grande protagonista nel riconquistare l'unità perduta?

### Parola di Dio, seme di unità nei Cristiani divisi

È dono del Signore che nonostante le fratture fra i cristiani la Parola di Dio sia così presente in mezzo a loro. Anzi è tanto presente che mentre celebra la loro parziale unità, denuncia più

gravemente le loro permanenti divisioni: per esempio nel momento della preghiera. I cristiani infatti pur separati si incontrano quando recitano il Padre Nostro, quando pregano con gli stessi salmi e anche quando, con labbra impure e cuori divisi, ripetono insieme la preghiera di unità del Cristo "siano una cosa sola". Vorrei anzi dire che la Parola di Dio permette di riconquistare almeno in parte quella comunione alla tavola non ancora comune dell'Eucarestia, dove il cristiano non solo deve cibarsi del Pane di vita ma anche della Parola di vita.

Parola di Dio dunque presente nel patrimonio rimasto comune alle singole chiese, presente sulla tavola eucaristica delle Chiese Separate, ma presente anche in quei momenti costruttivi verso la speranza di unità che sono i tanti dialoghi bilaterali che vanno rendendosi sempre più intensi fra le diverse confessioni. In essi la Parola costituisce la base e il punto di riferimento necessario per il confronto nella dottrina, con un approfondimento dal quale possono emergere più facilmente i valori comuni. La Parola di Dio anzi aiuta nella sua autenticità e nella luce dello Spirito Santo a superare tante incrostazioni storiche, ad andare oltre le prevenzioni vicendevoli, a cancellare i condizionamenti culturali.

Ma, parlando della Parola come elemento costruttivo nel cammino ecumenico, non possiamo dimenticare la Costituzione dogmatica sulla Divina Rivelazione conosciuta come *Dei Verbum* e frutto del Concilio Vaticano II. È caratteristico che questo documento sia stato ispirato soprattutto dal Segretariato per l'unità dei cristiani. È ancora più importante che Paolo VI abbia affidato l'adempimento di questo documento al Card. Bea. Colui che ha dato tanto grande impulso all'ecumenismo e nello stesso tempo allo studio e alla diffusione della Parola di Dio. Proprio per ispirazione di Paolo VI e per opera del Cardinal Bea è sorta quella Federazione Biblica Cattolica che ha il compito di attuare nella vita della Chiesa i principi fondamentali della *Dei Verbum*. In esso le dimensioni ecumeniche più evidenti sono "l'accesso di tutti

alla Parola di Dio e le traduzioni interconfessionali”.

### **La Parola fonte di comunione**

Così da una Costituzione conciliare e quindi da uno dei momenti più visibili e più solenni di comunione nella Chiesa, il Concilio Vaticano II, nasce il servizio di comunione che la Federazione Biblica Cattolica svolge alla Parola di Dio sempre feconda di comunione. La “Parola” infatti è espressione non solo di un dire, da parte di Dio; la Parola neppure esprime solo il dirsi di Dio: il vero compimento della Parola è il dirsi. Infatti nella coscienza ebraica la Parola non è solo un segno fonetico, ma un evento di comunione; per cui il Dio che parla è amicizia. La *Dei Verbum*, quasi poeticamente descrive questo rapporto Dio Uomo attraverso la Parola. “*Dio invisibile, nel suo grande amore parla agli uomini come ad amici e si intrattiene con essi per invitarli ed ammetterli alla comunione con se*” (*Dei Verbum* 1,2).

Questa sottolineatura di finalità della Parola per la comunione può riguardare anche le singole Chiese, indipendentemente dal loro cammino ecumenico.

Ogni volta infatti che una Chiesa approfondisce nella Parola la comunione col suo Dio si rende più disponibile, più preparata e più forte nel superare le difficoltà per incontrarsi nella stessa comunione con le altre Chiese.

### **La Parola che si incarna crea unità**

In questa luce mi piace pensare ad un'altra dimensione della comunione fra l'uomo e Dio: quella rivelata dalla parola “Incarnazione”. Essa è richiamata precisamente dalla *Dei Verbum* come incarnazione della Parola di Dio nella parola dell'uomo: “*le Parole di Dio infatti espresse con lingue umane si sono fatte simili al parlare dell'uomo, come già il Verbo dell'Eterno Padre avendo assunto la debolezza della natura umana si fece simile all'uomo*” (13). Anche questo concetto di incarnazione mi pare ponga le Chiese di fronte ad una grande responsabilità. La Parola di Dio infatti ha sempre bisogno di una continua incarnazione nelle diverse culture, nelle diverse tradizioni, nelle diverse lingue. In questa azione direi che l'opera della Chiesa trova analogia nel Grembo di Maria perché come Maria offre il Suo Corpo così le Chiese offrono i linguaggi umani affinché la Parola di Dio possa incarnarsi e manifestarsi. Ma è possibile questa azione senza una comunità, senza una consultazione, senza uno scambio, senza una fraternità che accolga nella stessa traduzione uomini di confessioni diverse e di culture diverse?

Crede che sia veramente importante la comunione creata dalla Parola di Dio dall'interno di una Chiesa nella sua vitalità e sempre in funzione del cammino ecumenico. Quando molte volte mi si chiede come mai l'Ecumenismo non offre progressi visibili, ritengo di trovare la spiegazione in quella mancanza di amore e di

comunione che si rivela all'interno delle singole Chiese. Se queste infatti non sentono il bisogno della ricerca e dello scambio dei valori diversi all'interno di se stesse, come posso desiderare la presenza e l'arricchimento da parte di coloro che sono ancora ritenuti così lontani da essere chiamati fratelli separati? Importante quindi lo sviluppo ecumenico proposto dalla Federazione Biblica Cattolica anche attraverso le sue pubblicazioni. Queste infatti offrono a tutte le Chiese le esperienze realizzate in una singola Chiesa nella riflessione e nella diffusione della Parola di Dio. In tal modo viene facilitata la comunione fra Chiese lontane. Ne nasce un dialogo ecclesiale, dialogo a distanza per la lontananza geografica ma anche intima. L'esperienza infatti che ogni Chiesa offre nella Parola di Dio è frutto di Spirito Santo: Colui che anche attraverso gli uomini e i mezzi più poveri, come una pubblicazione raccoglie in comunione tutte le Chiese nell'unica Chiesa di Cristo.

### **La Parola suscita profeti che esigono comunione**

Ma la parola comunione nel rapporto interno di una Chiesa come fra le singole Chiese, non significa solo incontro e condivisione o superamento di antiche barriere; significa anche donarsi a vicenda per farsi crescere. La Federazione Biblica Cattolica si dedica a questa creativa efficace della Parola di Dio. Lo fa quando presenta la Parola in quella fecondità tradotta e sottolineata dal tema della terza Assemblea Plenaria di Bangalore (1984): “*Fossero tutti profeti nel Popolo di Dio*” (n. 11). Dovremmo però essere tutti consapevoli che la vera accoglienza della Parola di Dio non sta nel conoscerla, neppure nel comprenderla, neppure nel ritenerla. La Parola di Dio ci ha veramente raggiunto quando, pronunciata da un Profeta, fa di ognuno dei profeti e quindi un popolo di profeti. Se veramente le Chiese riuscissero a rendere profeti i loro membri, questi sentirebbero come hanno sentito i missionari Presbiteriani nel 1910, la impossibilità di una profezia turbata dai rumori delle testimonianze divisioni. Allora l'annuncio della Parola di Dio dovrebbe avere come priorità la testimonianza efficace che la Parola di Dio ha nel creare unità fra i cristiani. Questi a loro volta diventerebbero fermenti di unità del genere umano e l'uomo diventa più capace di sviluppare l'ascolto in dialogo.

### **La Bibbia sviluppa la identità ecclesiale e quindi la comunione**

Un ulteriore elemento di comunione ecclesiale è rappresentato non solo dallo stare insieme, ma da un fecondo crescere di ogni Chiesa alla sua pienezza. Tipico ed essenziale di ogni Comunità ecclesiale è il rivelare e presentare in sé i lineamenti del Cristo, il quale fa di tanti “un corpo solo”. La Bibbia diventa nella sua proposta pastorale elemento fondante per il cammino ecumenico quando avverte che la Parola non deve diventare un idolo; la Parola di Dio è vivente, è Parola fatta carne, non fatta libro.

L'apostolato biblico quindi opera per la comunione quando nella sua azione propone e sviluppa con la presenza della Bibbia le tre essenziali dimensioni di Chiesa: quella catechistica, liturgica e caritativa. Queste dimensioni infatti non sono solo aspetti organizzativi, ma lineamenti del Cristo che, proprio attraverso la Parola si rende presente, attraverso gesti culturali, caritativi o di insegnamento, come il Maestro, il Sacerdote e il Servo.

Per sottolineare quanto detto sino a questo momento sulla comunione e per aprirmi più specificamente alla comunione come rapporto ecumenico vorrei richiamare un episodio che ho vissuto pochi mesi or sono nella "Lauma" di Kiev. Incontravo un giovanissimo monaco. Nella breve conversazione, alla mia domanda sul bisogno più grave che rivelasse la gioventù russa, mi rispondeva con una sola parola che mi ha meravigliato e quasi stupito: la Comunione.

Un'altra annotazione: nel resoconto dell'incontro dei Vescovi Cristiani d'Europa a Compostela 1992, i due Presidenti, Arnaud e il Cardinal Martini affermano "a livello locale la cooperazione ecumenica è già possibile nella evangelizzazione: traduzione, diffusione e studio della Bibbia in comune". Non solo, la Bibbia opera per la comunione quando invita i cristiani a collaborare insieme per i valori sociali. Si tratta di un libro che apre il nostro rapporto con Dio, ma apre anche l'uomo ai fratelli con i valori in essa contenuti, "infatti la Bibbia è uno dei pochi libri dell'umanità che sta dalla parte degli oppressi"<sup>1</sup>.

### **Con la Bibbia la Federazione Biblica Cattolica e le Società Bibliche per l'ecumenismo**

A questo punto, dopo aver parlato dell'azione biblica aperta all'ecumenismo da parte della Federazione Biblica Cattolica è necessario richiamare la operosa attività delle Società Bibliche. Queste, di antica estrazione protestante sono ora impegnate in un serio servizio a tutte le Chiese.

#### **a) Le traduzioni interconfessionali**

La collaborazione tra Società Biblica (S.B.) e Federazione Biblica Cattolica (F.B.C.) sono intense soprattutto nella diffusione e nella traduzione. È certamente un fattore di ecumenismo il fatto che negli ultimi quindici anni siano state tradotte le Bibbie in centosessanta lingue e sempre in forma interconfessionale attraverso collaborazione interconfessionale di studiosi e soprattutto di esperti biblici.

#### **b) La collaborazione ecumenica**

La collaborazione F.B.C. e S.B. si apre alla azione ecumenica anche attraverso quella consistente documentazione di amore che è l'aiuto economico. L'offerta in denari è utile per permettere a

tanti fratelli di essere raggiunti dalla Parola di Dio. Purtroppo diversamente non potrebbero disporre proprio per la povertà materiale che impedisce, attraverso la mancanza di traduzioni di accogliere il messaggio, o attraverso la disponibilità del libro della Bibbia di ascoltarla quotidianamente in un rapporto personale. Purtroppo invece dobbiamo constatare che esiste presso i cristiani, per quanto separati nei valori, il comune peccato del "consumismo biblico". Per esso in molte famiglie esiste più di una Bibbia che non viene letta, mentre in tanti popoli non esiste la possibilità materiale di possederne una sola. Un esempio per tutti il Camerun, dove per ottenere una Bibbia è necessario che un operaio lavori un mese mentre nei nostri paesi basta un quarto d'ora di remunerazione.

#### **c) La testimonianza di unità attraverso la Bibbia**

L'azione collaborante delle Società Bibliche e della Federazione Cattolica assume valori ecumenici che ho avuto occasione di sperimentare. Potrei citare un documento inviato a tutti i Vescovi dell'Est. In esso viene presentata l'azione dei due organismi con le firme dei Segretari generali dell'uno e dell'altro e con un'unica firma di convalida comune, la mia quale Presidente della Federazione Biblica e Vice Presidente per le Società Bibliche. Un primo documento che è testimonianza di unità di cristiani nella Parola e nella organizzazione, di fronte a popoli che attualmente si trovano nella grande povertà che impedisce al loro desiderio di possedere la Parola e di viverla.

#### **d) La Bibbia provoca incontri ecumenici**

Ma anche all'interno delle singole nazioni l'opera ecumenica delle Società Bibliche e della F.B.C. è importante quando faticosamente riescono a raccogliere attorno ad uno stesso tavolo di studio cristiani che ben difficilmente si sarebbero incontrati per dialoghi ecumenici. Sensibili invece ai valori biblici sono disposti a ritrovarsi per il lavoro di nuove traduzioni reclamato urgentemente dai loro popoli. Ho seguito questa esperienza in molti paesi dell'Est in Cecoslovacchia, in Polonia, in Ungheria, in Lettonia, in Estonia, in Ucraina. In alcuni paesi questo coagulo con finalità biblica non solo raccoglie i cristiani divisi, ma anche i cattolici che sono profondamente contrastanti per estrazione nazionale o per diversità di riti. Appunto l'Ucraina ne è un esempio e tanti altri paesi lo documentano. Non posso dimenticare in Cecoslovacchia l'incontro con il Cardinale Tomasek il quale, quando gli presentai l'ipotesi di una Società Biblica ed il lavoro della Federazione Biblica Cattolica, mi ascoltò tanto attentamente, per circa un'ora, e mi confidò "siamo poveri di tutto, abbiamo tanto bisogno di aiuto". Salutandomi mi disse "per me questo è il giorno più bello della mia vita" e l'espressione tanto più valida se si pensa che il compianto cardinale aveva allora novantun'anni.

Un altro esempio vissuto a Leopoli durante la festa dell'Epifania; dove decine di migliaia di persone stavano fuori

<sup>1</sup> Federazione Biblica Cattolica a Bogotà n. 6.

dalla porta della Chiesa da tre ore per partecipare sotto la neve alla liturgia. Era un atteggiamento di apertura, o forse di disponibilità alla fede; ma esso rende tanto più necessario il sostegno della Parola di Dio affinché questi valori siano resi consistenti e possano affrontare le difficoltà di un ambiente in cui tanto scarsa è stata la formazione religiosa a causa delle situazioni politiche; mentre quella che esiste è resa pericolante dalle ventate consumistiche dell'Europa occidentale. Quale ulteriore esempio di collaborazione, direi ecumenica fra la Federazione Biblica e le Società Bibliche, merita ricordare una popolazione primitiva nella seconda Cordigliera delle Ande che io ho visitato. Attraverso le Società Bibliche i loro suoni sono stati tradotti in lettere ed il loro primo libro è stato così il Nuovo Testamento. In tal maniera essi venivano alfabetizzati ed evangelizzati insieme. A questo punto il Vescovo mi scriveva: abbiamo le Bibbie ma non abbiamo i dollari per comprarle. L'intervento della F.B.C., attraverso alcune agenzie europee, è riuscito a rispondere a questa esigenza. Così anche di fronte a quelle popolazioni la Bibbia è diventata testimonianza dell'unità che la Parola di Dio crea nelle esigenze religiose di evangelizzazione ed umane di alfabetizzazione.

#### e) Iniziative comuni di Apostolato Biblico

Un altro aspetto importante di riflessione biblica che viene sviluppato molte volte in collaborazione fra Società Bibliche e Federazione Biblica Cattolica sono le "giornate", le "settimane", i "mesi" o gli "anni" della Bibbia. È una iniziativa di cui io stesso ho avuto occasione di parlare col Santo Padre. La loro proposta ha un profondo valore di formazione ecclesiale nella Parola e nello stesso tempo di apertura ecumenica. Tali celebrazioni hanno lo scopo di approfondire il significato della Parola di Dio che continuamente viene proposta, di educare le persone a scorrere la Bibbia ed accoglierne il messaggio, di formare gruppi biblici che sostengano la cultura biblica del Popolo di Dio, di scegliere anno per anno i temi diversi che, illuminati dalla Bibbia, a loro volta rendono più chiari nella luce cristiana tanti settori e aspetti della vita. L'iniziativa si va diffondendo, richiamata per ben tre volte nel documento di Bogotà, accolta e già in parte sperimentata con entusiasmo negli ambienti protestanti e cattolici, particolarmente viva là dove viene sviluppata in forma ecumenica.

Anche nel dialogo con le altre religioni è difficile pensare a cristiani che dialogano separatamente. La ricchezza comune della Parola offerta dai cristiani potrebbe essere maggiormente valorizzata dalle altre religioni; mentre in questo dialogo anche gli stessi cristiani potrebbero scoprire nuove profondità nella stessa Parola di Dio.

#### La Parola insegna i modi dell'ecumenismo

Ma la Parola non è solo base di unità, non è solo strumento necessario alla finalità delle Chiese; essa segna anche il modo con

cui i cristiani devono percorrere la strada della unità.

La Parola infatti è paziente perché non misura tanto la risposta quanto il dono di sé; ed è così che i cristiani debbono donarsi senza aspettare sempre il corrispettivo del ricambio da parte dell'altro anche sul piano ecumenico. Nello stesso tempo la Parola presenta Dio che prende l'iniziativa del dialogo e del Dio che risponde all'uomo; anche nel cammino ecumenico bisogna saper prendere iniziative, bisogna sempre essere attenti a rispondere alle domande formulate o non formulate dall'altro.

Inoltre la Parola di Dio non si limita a parlare, ma provoca a parlare. Dio infatti dà la parola affinché l'altro si esprima. Nell'ecumenismo forse le Chiese hanno parlato tanto, ma raramente hanno messo l'altro nelle condizioni di parlare, di esprimersi e di dire tutto di se stesso.

Ancora, Dio offre la Parola Sua purissima alle nostre labbra impure perché l'annunciamo; l'ecumenismo dovrebbe insegnarci ad ascoltare i valori che vengono annunciati dalle altre confessioni, anche se riteniamo che non tutto il lavoro patrimoniale e il loro comportamento sia accettabile.

Soprattutto la Parola di Dio è stata sempre feconda di diversità nella creazione, nella Grazia della Redenzione e nello Spirito Santo.

Ebbene, proprio per questa diversità che nasce dalla Parola di Dio, i cristiani dovrebbero contemplarsi a vicenda per capirsi nelle diversità culturali, storiche e tradizionali, facendo in maniera che le diversità non diventino mai divisioni.

Finalmente la Parola di Dio rivela la sua pienezza quando dialogo in cui l'uno si apre all'altro per raggiungere la comunione. È la stessa legge che Dio ha voluto vivere con l'uomo quando la Parola Sua ha provocato la parola dell'uomo per arrivare alla comunione perfetta. I cristiani, ricchi della Parola di Dio dovranno saperla trasformare in un dialogo perché questa realizzi la "pienezza" della sua potenza portandoli alla "pienezza" della comunione. D'altra parte gli stessi cristiani nello sforzo di dialogo devono essere consapevoli di quanto così felicemente diceva Martin Buber: *"quando due dialoganti dialogano seriamente (cioè sono anche disposto a cambiare) uno degli interlocutori è sempre Dio"*. Vogli ancora richiamare che una grande strada dell'ecumenismo non è solo affidarci alla organizzazione e limitarci solo ai dialoghi; è necessario realizzare quel principio che in questa esposizione abbiamo così sovente richiamato e sperimentato: nell'ecumenismo bisogna fare subito insieme tutto ciò che noi siamo costretti a fare separatamente. Soprattutto però credo sia compito delle Chiese portare l'uomo di oggi anzitutto a scoprire la bellezza della parola umana perché solo così scoprirà la bellezza di una Parola Divina in una incarnazione che supera naturalmente i limiti delle nostre povere divisioni.

Soffermiamoci ancora un momento.

#### Parole umane e Parola divina segno di comunione

Di fronte all'urgenza di comunione dobbiamo prendere in

considerazione anche il contenuto della “parola umana”.

Essa non solo serve per approfondire e per presentare la Parola di Dio. Una sua contemplazione dimostra la efficacia di comunione che essa porta in se stessa.

La “parola umana” ha già in sé una grande forza di comunione. Essa infatti è comunione nell'uomo perché sintesi di fisiologia e di idee, di volontà e di sensibilità; la parola è Comunione anche attraverso il tempo perché ogni parola esigendo di dover essere pronunciata una alla volta riesce così a far sintesi di ordine e di priorità fra le diverse idee.

Ma la parola umana rivela in se stessa anche un bisogno di comunione; perché ogni parola è così ricca da comunicare sempre qualche cosa e, nello stesso tempo, è tanto povera da aver bisogno di altre che la completino per diventare comprensibile messaggio. Inoltre è segno di comunione la parola umana perché acquista valore se preceduta e seguita da parole che siano diverse, quasi a dimostrare visibilmente e acusticamente la necessità e la bellezza delle diversità per fare comunione.

Rivela ancora valore di comunione ogni parola perché collega il passato di una cultura che l'ha formulata, al presente che la provoca, mentre porta verso il futuro sollecitando e attendendo risposte. Addirittura crea comunione la parola perché favorisce uno scambio di verità colte sotto angolature diverse. Questo avviene quando la Parola cresce a quella dimensione di dialogo nel quale gli interlocutori sono disposti ad arricchirsi vicendevolmente.

Soprattutto, come in ogni comunione, la parola umana è feconda. Essa infatti non solo comunica la verità, ma spesso contribuisce ad approfondirla ed a conquistarla. Traducendo

infatti la verità in parole, queste, nel gesto stesso di pronunciarle, rivelano aspetti nuovi e più profondi nella verità stessa che si vuole comunicare.

Ebbene, questa parola umana così intessuta di comunione, mi pare possa essere considerata quasi “materia sacramentale” quando viene assunta dalla Parola divina per diventare una efficace Rivelazione da parte di Dio ed accoglienza di amore da parte dell'uomo. Nasce così la *Dei Verbum* che nell'incontro di parola umana e divina porta la comunione ai livelli più alti dell'umanità e della divinità. La Parola di Dio diventa Comunione infatti perché unisce Dio all'uomo, unisce la rivelazione alla storia rendendo entrambi più comprensibili, unisce il Verbo fatto carne alle povere labbra umane che diventano profetiche di comunione.

Come non pensare allora che sulla strada della unità è necessaria la forza ed il rispetto della Parola di Dio, ma è altrettanto importante, soprattutto per l'unità del Mondo di oggi, riconoscere il valore della parola umana che, vicino alla parola della Redenzione, esalta la parola della Creazione.

Forse allora le divisioni si riveleranno anche come una immaturità sulla via incompleta della Incarnazione del verbo nella parola umana.

Inoltre questa corresponsabilità nell'uso della parola umana e della Parola Divina di fronte ai problemi del passato e del futuro riguardo all'unità, come cristiani ci farà ancora più responsabili; perché forse le divisioni nella Chiesa rendono più gravi le lontananze fra gli uomini, mentre le fratture fra gli uomini, tanto dovuto alle parole abusate, hanno tristi conseguenze anche nella vita della Chiesa.



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## The Revised Ecumenical Directory of the Catholic Church: A Valuable Instrument for Continued Ecumenical Commitment and Cooperation

by

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### I: Introduction

On 25 March, 1993, after a process of revision which started in 1985, His Holiness Pope John Paul II approved the new *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*. On 8 June, 1993, I had the privilege of presenting this document to the public during a Press Conference in the **Sala Stampa** of the Vatican. It was published at that time in English, French and German. Translations in Spanish and Italian have since become available. Other translations are being prepared: Portuguese, Dutch, Czech and Hindi, to mention those of which I have knowledge at this time.

Already during the Second Vatican Council, the preparation of an Ecumenical Directory was announced by the then Archbishop of Rouen, His Excellency Msgr. J.M. Martin, when presenting to the Council Fathers the official *Relatio* on the draft Decree *De Oecumenismo*. It was indicated that this proposed document would deal more in detail with relations with other Christians according to the general principles set out in the Council document. Immediately following the conclusion of the Council sessions, the Secretariat for Christian Unity began drawing up the promised document, which was then published in two parts, in 1967 and 1970 respectively, under the following titles:

1. *A Directory for the Application of the Second Vatican Council's decisions on Ecumenism*<sup>1</sup>;
2. *Ecumenism in Higher Education*<sup>2</sup>.

Pope John Paul II, in giving reasons for the revision of this

first Directory, affirmed that it "has given valuable service in orientating, coordinating and developing ecumenical effort"<sup>3</sup>. By 1988, however, it was obvious that the time had come for this document to be revised.

Developments within the ecumenical movement have required the competent authorities to issue from time to time norms, directives, suggestions and warnings on various subjects or topics which, in some aspect or other, are relevant to the ecumenical dimension (for example, mixed marriages, evangelisation, catechesis, ecumenical collaboration, etc.).

Furthermore, a new and determining factor appeared in the publication of the Code of Canon Law for the Latin Church in 1983 and that for the Eastern Churches in 1990. This legislation naturally affected the ecumenical activity of the Catholic Church. If on the one hand the two Codes took on entirely the ecumenical orientation of the Second Vatican Council, on the other - by their very nature - they could not deal with individual ecumenical questions in full detail.

These circumstances therefore suggested a **revision** of the first Directory, which would have two basic characteristics:

- a) to gather and bring together the essential principles and norms issued by the Catholic Church in the ecumenical forum;
- b) to present such legislation in a coherent, logical and consistent way, so that the new Directory would not only be a document for **consultation**, but also an instrument of **formation**.

<sup>1</sup> AAS 59 (8), 1967, pp. 574-592.

<sup>2</sup> AAS 62 (10), 1970, pp. 705-724.

<sup>3</sup> AAS 80 (9), 1988, p. 1203.

The responsibility for this revision belonged primarily to the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, as is clear from the tasks entrusted to the Pontifical Council by the Apostolic Constitution *Pastor Bonus*. It is the task of the Council “to ensure that the decrees of the Second Vatican Council (on ecumenism) are put into practice”, and “it is concerned with the correct interpretation of ecumenical principles and ensures their practice”<sup>4</sup>.

The reworking of the 1967-1970 Directory was nevertheless a complex task, involving consultation with the Episcopal Conferences, the other departments of the Roman Curia particularly interested in its themes. As required by the Apostolic Constitution *Pastor Bonus*, the draft of the new text was sent to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith for examination prior to its publication.

On 27 March 1993, the Secretary of State, His Eminence Angelo Cardinal Sodano, announced the Holy Father's authorization to publish the Ecumenical Directory with a formula similar to that used for the first Directory, namely:

*On March 25, His Holiness Pope John Paul II approved this Directory, confirmed it with his authority and ordered that it be published - anything to the contrary notwithstanding.*

We read in the new Codes of Canon Law that:

*“it pertains especially to the entire College of Bishops and to the Apostolic See to foster and direct among Catholics the ecumenical movement, the purpose of which is the restoration of unity between all Christians which, by the will of Christ, the Church is bound to promote”<sup>5</sup>.*

The Ecumenical Directory is a document which has been prepared as a means of contributing to and achieving this task. It is addressed in the first place “to the Pastors of the Catholic Church, but it also concerns the faithful who are called to pray and work for the unity of Christians, under the direction of their Bishops”<sup>6</sup>.

It is not therefore a dialogue document, but an internal Catholic instruction. At the same time, the Directory itself expresses the hope “that it will be useful to members of Churches and Ecclesial Communities that are not in full communion with the Catholic Church. They share with Catholics a concern for the quality of ecumenical activity. It

*will be an advantage for them to know the direction those guiding the ecumenical movement in the Catholic Church wish to give to ecumenical action, and the criteria that are officially approved in the Church”<sup>7</sup>.*

I should like now to give a brief over-view of the structure and contents of the new Directory, and then point out some of the features that deserve special mention.

## **II: Structure and contents**

The new Directory opens with a PREFACE, which indicates the reasons for the revision, those to whom the document is addressed and its aims. This is followed by five chapters.

### **1. The Search for Christian Unity**

This is a new chapter, theological in character, in which there is a presentation of the ecumenical commitment of the Catholic Church, based on the *doctrinal principles* set down by the Second Vatican Council (in particular, in the Decree *Unitatis Redintegratio*, chapter 1, and in the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, nn. 8 and 15).

### **2. The Organization in the Catholic Church of the Service of Christian Unity**

Here the Directory wishes to involve in the ecumenical task persons and structures at all levels of the Church's life. It refers especially to those persons and structures particularly engaged in promoting Christian Unity and sets out norms that govern their activities.

This chapter takes up much of what was already prescribed for diocesan ecumenical commissions and the ecumenical commissions of Episcopal Conferences in chapter I of the 1967 Directory. While reinforcing those norms, however, the new Directory indicates other areas and structures that should promote ecumenism. It refers in this context to supernational bodies which exist in various forms for assuring cooperation and assistance among Episcopal Conferences, to Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, to organizations of Catholic faithful in a particular territory or nation, as well at the international level, dealing with questions such as spiritual renewal, action for peace and social justice, education, economic aid and development. The chapter closes with a brief description of the competence and task of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, regarding which it points out the importance of this Council being

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<sup>4</sup> N° 136, #1.

<sup>5</sup> CIC, can. 755, §1; cf. CCEO, can. 902.

<sup>6</sup> N° 4.

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<sup>7</sup> N° 5.

informed of important initiatives taken at various levels of the life of the Church, especially when such initiatives have international implications. The Directory rightly notes:

*“The mutual exchange of information and advice will benefit ecumenical activities at the international level as well as those on every level of the Church's life. Whatever facilitates a growth of harmony and of coherent ecumenical engagement also reinforces communion within the Catholic Church”<sup>8</sup>.*

### **3. Ecumenical Formation in the Catholic Church**

The importance of formation for the future of the Ecumenical movement is acknowledged by all involved in promoting Christian Unity. This third chapter of the new Directory enters deeply into this question, referring to the various categories of persons involved in formation; and to the scope and methods of formation, with their various doctrinal and practical aspects.

The new Directory draws on the second part of the former Directory - especially the 1970 document *“Ecumenism in higher education”*, but here the treatment is broader and embraces all the components of the Church. This will be obvious from the following brief outline of the structure of this chapter:

- a) After an introduction dealing with the necessity and purpose of ecumenical formation, and the need to adapt this formation to the concrete situation of the persons involved, the Directory deals firstly with the *formation of all the faithful*, declaring in this connection that *“in the life of the faithful, imbued with the Spirit of Christ, the gift prayed for by Christ before his passion, the grace of unity, is of primary importance”<sup>9</sup>.*

A word is said about the *means of formation*: hearing and studying the Word of God, preaching, catechesis, liturgy, the spiritual life and collaboration in social and charitable initiatives.

Suitable settings for such formation are indicated, namely the family, parish, school, various groups, associations and ecclesial movements.

- b) A second part of this chapter deals with the formation of those engaged in Pastoral work: ordained ministers and then ministers and collaborators who are not ordained.

Emphasis is placed on *doctrinal formation*, and in this connection on the ecumenical dimension in the different subjects to be studied, of theological disciplines in general and of individual theological disciplines. There is of course need for a specific course in Ecumenism and suggestions are made about the content of such a course and regarding the organization of this course. The Directory states that it would be useful in certain circumstances to invite lecturers and experts of other traditions to Catholic Institutions of formation and to provide those preparing for pastoral ministry with ecumenical experience during their period of formation.

The role of Ecclesiastical Faculties, Catholic Universities and Specialized Ecumenical Institutes in formation is then considered and certain guide-lines set down for the way in which these various organs of formation carry out their task. The formation they give is important for dialogue and for progress toward that Christian unity which dialogue itself helps Christians to attain.

A final word is devoted to *permanent formation*, since *“doctrinal formation and learning experience are not limited to the period of formation, but ask for a continuous ‘aggiornamento’ of the ordained ministers and pastoral workers, in view of the continual evolution within the ecumenical movement”<sup>10</sup>.* Renewal programmes for clergy can be organized through meetings, conferences, retreats, days of recollection or study, and so on.

Permanent formation should provide priests, religious, deacons and laity with *“systematic instruction on the present state of the ecumenical movement, so that they may be able to introduce the ecumenical viewpoint into preaching, catechesis, prayer and Christian life in general. If it seems suitable and possible, it would be good to invite a minister of another Church to expound its tradition or speak on pastoral problems which are often common to all”<sup>11</sup>.*

The Directory mentions also the possibility of interconfessional meetings aimed at improving reciprocal relationships and at trying to resolve pastoral problems together. To give concrete form to these initiatives it might be useful to create local and regional clergy councils or associations.

Theology faculties and Institutes of Higher learning, as well as seminaries or other institutes of formation, can contribute to permanent formation; the media too can play an important role by providing information and the Episcopal Commissions by making available documentation.

Anticipating what is to be said in Chapter IV, the Directory calls for the full use of various kinds of spiritual meetings *“to explore those elements of spirituality which are held in common, as well as those which are particular. These*

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<sup>8</sup> N° 54.

<sup>9</sup> N° 58.

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<sup>10</sup> N° 91.

<sup>11</sup> N° 91.

meetings”, it points out, “provide an opportunity to reflect on unity and to pray for the reconciliation of all Christians. The participation of members of different Churches and ecclesial Communities at such meetings can help to foster mutual understanding and the growth of spiritual communion”<sup>12</sup>.

#### **4. Communion in Life and Spiritual Activity among the Baptized**

Having set the scene as it were in the first three chapters, the Ecumenical Directory now considers ecumenical activity: in chapter IV *spiritual activity* and in chapter V *cooperation, dialogue and common witness*.

Chapter IV begins with a section on the existing communion with other Christians that is based on the sacramental bond of Baptism. The sacrament of baptism is treated at some length, since it is through this sacrament that we share a real communion, one with the other, even when that communion is not yet perfect. Hence it is important to ascertain the validity of baptism conferred by ministers of other Churches and ecclesial Communities. Useful guide-lines are given in this connection<sup>13</sup>, and rules are also included concerning god-parents from a Church or community not in full communion with the Catholic Church<sup>14</sup>.

General Principles are then set out regarding the sharing of *spiritual activities and resources*. The Directory encourages Christians to share these activities and resources, by prayer in common, participation in liturgical worship in the strict sense and by making common use of places of worship and all necessary objects for worship.

Two very important principles are enunciated in this connection:

- a) *“In spite of the serious difficulties which prevent full ecclesial communion, it is clear that all those who by baptism are incorporated into Christ share many elements of the Christian life. Thus there exists a real, even if imperfect, communion among Christians which can be expressed in many ways, including sharing in prayer and liturgical worship”*;
- b) Since this communion is incomplete, because of differences of faith and understanding, unrestricted sharing of spiritual endowments is not possible.

This is a complex reality and requires norms which take

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<sup>12</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>13</sup> N° 99.

<sup>14</sup> N° 98.

into account the diverse ecclesial situations of the Churches and Communities involved. On the one hand, Christians are able to esteem and rejoice in the spiritual riches they have in common; on the other hand, they are also made aware of the necessity of overcoming the separations that still exist. “*Since eucharistic concelebration is a visible manifestation of full communion of faith, worship and community life of the Catholic Church, expressed by ministers of that Church, it is not permitted to celebrate the Eucharist with ministers of other Churches or ecclesial Communities*”<sup>15</sup>.

The Directory reminds us that “*the Churches and ecclesial Communities not in full communion with the Catholic Church have by no means been deprived of significance and value in the mystery of salvation, for the Spirit of Christ has not refrained from using them as means of salvation*”. Hence it is recommended that consultations on spiritual sharing, which should include a certain reciprocity, take place between appropriate Catholic authorities and those of other Communities.

Prayer in common is in itself a way to spiritual reconciliation and so is strongly encouraged in the Directory. Shared prayer should be particularly concerned with the restoration of Christian unity, but may be appropriate whenever Catholics and other Christians wish to place before the Lord common concerns. “*Under the direction of those who have proper formation and experience, it may be helpful in certain cases to arrange for spiritual sharing in the form of days of recollection, spiritual exercises, groups for study and sharing of traditions of spirituality, and more stable associations for a deeper exploration of a common spiritual life*”<sup>16</sup>. While representatives of the Churches, ecclesial Communities and other groups are encouraged to arrange common prayer services, the Directory states that it is not advisable to have these take place on Sundays, since Catholics are bound to attend Mass on that day and on days of precept.

There is an interesting section on the *sharing in non-Sacramental Liturgical worship*. Liturgical worship is defined as “*worship carried out according to books, prescriptions and customs of a Church or ecclesial Community, presided over by a minister or delegate of that Church or ecclesial Community*”, and may be the celebration of one or more sacraments or non-sacramental.

Catholics are encouraged to take part on appropriate occasions in the non-sacramental liturgical worship of other Churches and ecclesial Communities. But with regard to *sharing in the sacramental life of other Churches and Communities, especially the Eucharist*, certain fundamental distinctions must be kept in mind:

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<sup>15</sup> N° 104.

<sup>16</sup> N° 114.

a) "between the Catholic Church and the Eastern Churches not in full communion with it, there is still a very close communion in matters of faith". Through the celebration of the Eucharist of the Lord in each of these Churches, the Church of God is built up and grows in stature. They possess true sacraments, above all - by apostolic succession - the priesthood and the Eucharist<sup>17</sup>. "This offers ecclesiological and sacramental grounds, according to the understanding of the Catholic Church, for allowing and even encouraging some sharing in liturgical worship, even of the Eucharist, with these Churches"<sup>18</sup>. At the same time, the Directory respects the fact that these Eastern Churches, on the basis of their own ecclesiological understanding, may have more restrictive disciplines in this matter (idem).

b) the situation is not the same with regard to other Churches and ecclesial Communities. The Catholic Church cannot make the same affirmations about the priesthood and the Eucharist; there is not a unity in faith sufficient to allow sacramental sharing, except in very special circumstances. Hence, in general, the Catholic Church "permits access to its Eucharistic communion and to the sacraments of penance and anointing of the sick, only to those who share its oneness in faith, worship and ecclesial life"<sup>19</sup>. The Directory gives guide-lines which should be of help to those who have difficult decisions to take in this connection.

The sharing of churches and church buildings, including in certain circumstances common ownership, is strongly recommended by the Directory, which also speaks of cooperation at the spiritual level in Catholic schools, hospitals and homes for the aged.

And then there are guide-lines on specific issues related to *Mixed Marriages*, which are constantly on the increase and which create a special challenge for the ecumenical movement. The Directory insists on the need to prepare adequately those about to enter a mixed marriage and where possible of contacts with the minister of the other Church or Community involved. This support should be available also after the marriage takes place. The chapter concludes with two numbers on eucharistic sharing in mixed marriages, at the time of the celebration and later on. It makes clear that "although the spouses in a mixed marriage share the sacraments of baptism and marriage, Eucharistic sharing can only be exceptional and in each case

the norms stated above (in the Directory) concerning the admission of a non-Catholic Christian to Eucharistic communion, as well as those concerning the participation of a Catholic in Eucharistic communion in another Church, must be observed"<sup>20</sup>.

### 5. Ecumenical Cooperation, Dialogue and Common Witness

As is the case with the first chapter of the new Ecumenical Directory, this fifth chapter is new. It does, however, draw largely on the document published by the Secretariat for Christian Unity in 1975: *Ecumenical collaboration on regional, national and local levels*. It also takes in, from the second part (1970) of the former Directory, the section on *collaboration in institutes of higher education*.

At the same time, this fifth chapter enters into some entirely new areas of cooperation, such as for example *ecumenical collaboration in missionary activity*, based on the conciliar Decree *Ad Gentes*, the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* and the Encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*; or the section on *ecumenical collaboration in the field of catechesis*, based on the directives of the Apostolic Exhortation *Catechesi Tradendae*.

The chapter begins with a powerful declaration about the value of common witness in our present age:

*"When Christians live and pray together in the way described in Chapter IV, they are giving witness to the faith which they share and to their baptism, in the name of God, the Father of all, in his Son, Jesus, the Redeemer of all, and in the Holy Spirit who transforms and unites all things through the power of love. Based on this communion of life and spiritual gifts, there are many other forms of ecumenical cooperation that express and promote unity and enhance the witness to the saving power of the Gospel that Christians give to the world"*<sup>21</sup>.

The Council Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis Redintegratio*<sup>22</sup>, pointed out the value for ecumenism of practical cooperation among Christians. Such cooperation, it states, not only "profoundly expresses that unity which already exists between them and illuminates more fully the face of Christ the servant", but also enables them to learn "how to smooth the way towards unity".

Taking up this challenge, the new Directory examines the

<sup>17</sup> Cf. UR, 14.

<sup>18</sup> N° 122.

<sup>19</sup> N° 129.

<sup>20</sup> N° 160.

<sup>21</sup> N° 161.

<sup>22</sup> N° 12.

possibility of cooperation in social and cultural life, in common study of social and ethical questions, in collaboration in development and other important areas of human need, including the stewardship of creation, in the medical field and in the means of social communication.

There are important guide-lines concerning the structuring of ecumenical cooperation, such as in Councils of Churches and Christian Councils, in the common work of translating and distributing the Bible, or in dialogue with other Religions.

Finally, it is here in chapter five that we find directives on ecumenical dialogue and its needs.

For those who express frustration at the slow pace of ecumenical progress, Chapter five offers a great variety of possible initiatives that, if taken up widely, could help advance the cause of Christian unity and hasten the day of a restoration of full, visible communion among all Christians.

### III: General considerations

In this presentation, I have sought to illustrate the *wider vision* that the revised edition of the Ecumenical Directory brings to the ecumenical task, by extending its treatment of persons, institutions and areas of cooperation that were not mentioned in the earlier Directory.

The whole structure of the Directory is based on the conviction that the ecumenical commitment involves, in specific areas of diverse responsibility, all elements of the Catholic Church, since, as we read in the conciliar Decree *Unitatis Redintegratio*:

*“The concern for restoring unity involves the whole Church, faithful and clergy alike. It extends to everyone, according to the talent of each, whether it be exercised in daily Christian living or in theological and historical studies”<sup>23</sup>.*

But perhaps the most striking feature of the new Directory is the first chapter itself on *The Search for Christian Unity*. For here we find for this first time in the Ecumenical Directory a reflection on the *doctrinal basis* of the ecumenical commitment and involvement of the Church in the ecumenical movement. It seemed of particular importance at this time for the Directory to explain the profound ecclesiological motives both for our ecumenical commitment and for the limits of our ecumenical cooperation.

The Ecumenical Directory, by its very nature, can neither broaden nor restrict the canonical norm. In this first chapter, what it seeks to do is to situate the ecumenical research within

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<sup>23</sup> N° 5.

the *ecclesiology of communion*, which is at the heart of present ecumenical understanding:

*“Thus united in the three-fold bond of faith, sacramental life and hierarchical ministry, the whole people of God comes to be what the tradition of faith from the Old Testament onwards have always called **koinonia**/communion. This is a key concept which inspired the ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council and to which recent teaching of the magisterium has given great importance”<sup>24</sup>.*

Awareness of the real yet imperfect communion existing between the Catholic Church and other Churches and ecclesial Communities is essential for an understanding of the nature of ecumenism and for progress towards Christian unity.

The Directory places before us in this connection four basic principles:

a) *The Church of Christ subsists in the Catholic Church*

In N° 17, we read:

*“Catholics hold the firm conviction that the one Church of Christ subsists in the Catholic Church, ‘which is governed by the successor of Peter and by the Bishops in communion with him’”.*

In the following number, the Directory recalls the following words from the Second Vatican Council Decree *Unitatis Redintegratio*:<sup>25</sup>

*“This unity, we believe, subsists in the Catholic Church as something she can never lose, and we hope that it will continue to increase until the end of time”.*

b) Despite the divisions that have intervened because of “*human folly and human sinfulness*”, and for which often enough men of both sides were to blame<sup>26</sup>, *communion among Christians has never been destroyed*. In fact, “*other Churches and ecclesial Communities, though not in full communion with the Catholic Church, retain in reality a certain communion with it*”<sup>27</sup>.

c) *This communion is **differentiated***. For all Churches and ecclesial Communities, the Ecumenical Directory

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<sup>24</sup> N° 12.

<sup>25</sup> N° 4.

<sup>26</sup> UR, 3.

<sup>27</sup> N° 18.

makes the general affirmation that “*the Spirit of Christ has not refrained from using them as the means of salvation*”<sup>28</sup>. In this context *Unitatis Redintegratio* indicated that “*some, even very many, of the most significant elements and endowments which go together to build up and give life to the Church itself can exist outside the visible boundaries of the Catholic Church*”<sup>29</sup>. But, as already mentioned above, “*between the Catholic Church and the Eastern Churches not in full communion with it, there is still a very close communion in matters of faith. Moreover, through the celebration of the Eucharist of the Lord in each of these Churches, the Church of God is built up and grows in stature...these Churches still possess true sacraments, above all - by apostolic succession - the priesthood and the eucharist*”<sup>30</sup>.

- d) “**No Christian, however, should be satisfied with these forms of communion.** They do not respond to the will of Christ, and weaken his Church in the exercise of its mission”<sup>31</sup>.

#### IV: Conclusion

I trust that I have shown the Revised Ecumenical Directory to be indeed “*a valuable instrument for continued Ecumenical Commitment and Cooperation*”. The very fact that this Directory has been drawn up and promulgated in such a solemn form is surely an indication of the continued commitment of the Catholic Church to the ecumenical movement. The Directory is a re-affirmation of the pledge to work for Christian Unity which was made by the Second Vatican Council and which has in the words of the 1985 Synod of Bishops “*inscribed itself deeply and indelibly in the consciousness of the Church*”<sup>32</sup>.

At the same time, the new Directory is a call to the Bishops throughout the world to reflect on the commitment of their local Churches to the ecumenical movement. The general

structure of the Directory is based on the need for parallel and complementary action at all levels within the Church. Special importance is given to the diocesan Ecumenical officer and to Ecumenical Commissions at diocesan level and within the Episcopal Conferences and Synods of Eastern Catholic Churches<sup>33</sup>.

The 1993 *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism* is the result of a wide consultation within the Catholic Church, involving Episcopal Conferences and dicasteries of the Roman Curia, with a particular collaboration between the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. It has been published with a formula that gives it extraordinary authority:

“*On March 25th 1993, His Holiness Pope John Paul II approved this Directory, confirmed it by his authority and ordered that it be published - anything to the contrary notwithstanding*”.

Already in January of this year, Pope John Paul II referred to the “*impending publication of the Directory*” in these words:

“*The desire to hasten the journey towards unity, an indispensable condition for a truly renewed evangelization, has motivated the Holy See to prepare the Ecumenical Directory of the Catholic Church, the publication of which is imminent. Based on the teaching of the Second Vatican Council and sensitive to developments in the ecumenical movement in recent years, it is meant to serve as a sure guide for deepening an open theological dialogue with each of the world's Christian communions.*

“*With all my heart I hope that when it is published, the Directory will strengthen the spirit of fraternal love and mutual respect among Christians on the arduous but exhilarating path which they are called to travel together towards full communion in truth and charity*”<sup>34</sup>.

That too is our hope and our constant prayer.

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<sup>28</sup> N° 18 and UR, 3.

<sup>29</sup> N° 3.

<sup>30</sup> N° 122.

<sup>31</sup> N° 19.

<sup>32</sup> *Relatio Finalis*, c. 7.

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<sup>33</sup> Nos. 37-47.

<sup>34</sup> *L'Osservatore Romano*, weekly English edition, 27th January 1993.