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A Protestant Comment on the WCC Framework

When talking about the Framework for Common Prayer at WCC gatherings, I would first underline a methodology used in preparing this document. Since it is not realistic to imagine that this document will concern only WCC events (all ecumenical organisations, WSCF included, greatly consider the decisions of WCC), the decision for this discussion to take place in an exclusive manner was inappropriate.

ONLY WORDING?

Next I consider the main decision of the Framework: the substitution of the phrase "ecumenical worship" with "common prayer" in order "to help clarify some of the concerns and ambiguities" of ecumenical spirituality. These concerns regard the fact that WCC "does not constitute 'the Church' or an ecclesial body itself." The Framework asserts that this is a matter of wording. Personally, I believe this new wording substantially devaluates ecumenical spirituality. According to my tradition (Italian Methodist), prayer is part of the worship, it has much dignity, but not as worship with others. Moreover, the definition of worship in the Anglican tradition is set up in the *Book of Common Prayer* (1559). In this case, common prayers are acts of an established church. This new wording may create more misunderstandings, by defining liturgies in WCC as common prayers, many people will understand WCC itself as a sort of "super-church".

COMMON DEFINITION OF ECUMENISM

Personally, I believe the churches should come to a common definition of "ecumenism". I believe ecumenism is humbly confessing the limits of our own traditions. I do not believe my tradition is the only way to be Christian; this is why I do not proselytise brothers and sisters from other traditions. In an ecumenical gathering, my wish is that Christians from different traditions will share their faith and their tradition, sharing how God is taking care of each one, how the Father created each one, how Jesus saved each one, how the Spirit lives with each one. In meeting my fellow Christians, I wish them to show me the image of God they carry.

CONFESSIONAL AND

INTERCONFESSIONAL

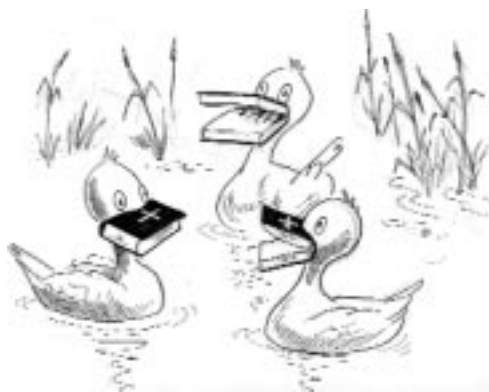
According to the Framework, the celebration of diversity has to be preserved by distinguishing "confessional" and "interconfessional" common prayer. Yet the Framework will realistically limit this celebration. If my sister wishes to lead worship and her tradition forbids this, do I have the right to stop her? By the way, there is no § on the leadership of men: if my tradition would not allow me to lead worship, what will be the procedure? If my brother or sister lives in an oppressed country, why should I limit them in taking their concerns to God in prayer? Do we seriously exclude that God answered the prayers of the oppressed when Communism and other dictatorships fell? If my brother or sister is limited in the way they call God, how can their prayer be true?

GUIDELINES FOR TAKING CARE

However, my perplexity on the Framework (which I believe is wrong and should be withdrawn) does not erase the concerns that led to it. Many Christians feel uneasy and unsafe in meeting other Christians. An ecumenical organisation should take care of them, because hardly any encounter will be at an equal level. We should work for this goal: every Christian should be and feel welcome in ecumenical gatherings. Liturgists should always explain to people what they are going to do. Not only every Christian should feel part of the ecumenical movement and know that he or she has a crucial

role in it. I would have preferred guidelines to welcome and take care of the others (as for example the WSCF Europe sexual harassment guidelines).

By limiting our worshipping together, we may limit what the Holy Spirit is doing in and among ourselves. Instead, we should take care of each other, praising God for our diversity and asking the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit to reconcile our brokenness.



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