

Julio de SANTA ANA

The Ecumenical Movement at the Crossroads

The modern ecumenical movement started to develop dynamically in the middle of the XIXth century. This development was initiated and sustained mainly by various lay movements including several Christian associations of young men and women, as well as by the concern of missionaries who became increasingly aware of the fact that confessional and denominational divisions negatively affect the very message of the evangelisation. Among the youth movements, the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF), founded in 1895, quickly became an organisation of great importance. In its branches different parts of the world were represented and worked together. The Federation provided a forum where the problems and challenges of the ecumenical rapprochement were discussed. Moreover, WSCF was the international organisation in which several of the new leaders of the ecumenical movement obtained an important part of their “ecumenical formation.”

I. DYNAMICS OF ECUMENICAL HISTORY

John R. MOTT was one of the youth leaders who participated in the meeting of Vadstena, Sweden, where the Federation was established. He was a lay person of the United Methodist Church of the USA, who in 1948 became the first Honorary President of the World Council of Churches (WCC). William TEMPLE (the later Archbishop of Canterbury) and Joseph H. OLDHAM (layman, later to become the first General Secretary of the International Missionary Council and the General Secretary of Life and Work) also took part in the initiation of the student Christian movement striving for the unity of the divided Christendom. The “Federation”, as it was called then, was the classic “nursery” of the ecumenical movement where most of its future leaders were trained for ecumenical co-operation.

If the XIXth century is considered a historical period in which churches had to respond to the challenges of the Western modernity (to both of its versions - the bourgeois and the proletarian), then the ecumenical movement is to be understood as one of the ways in which Christian communities, especially in Western

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Europe and North America, responded to the process of modernisation. It was an answer that started to be articulated in different situations in North America, in the United Kingdom, in Constantinople, in Scandinavia, as well as in other parts of the world.

The concern and quest for Christian unity was not a newly born idea in Western Europe. Already in the second half of the XVIIth century diplomats like LEIBNIZ and JABLONSKY consecrated some of their efforts to the reconstruction of the unity of all Christians, which seemed to have been lost from the beginning of the second millennium of the Christian era. The ecumenical movement was concretised little by little among the youth and the laity. Some churches followed at the official level what had been started at the grassroots. It is especially necessary to mention the Anglican Community among those who played a significant role in the promotion of ecumenism. The already proposed suggestions were realized for the first time in the Anglican Church in the so-called “Lambeth Quadrilateral”, which played a very positive role in the ecumenical dialogue at the end of the XIXth century and at the beginning of the XXth century.¹

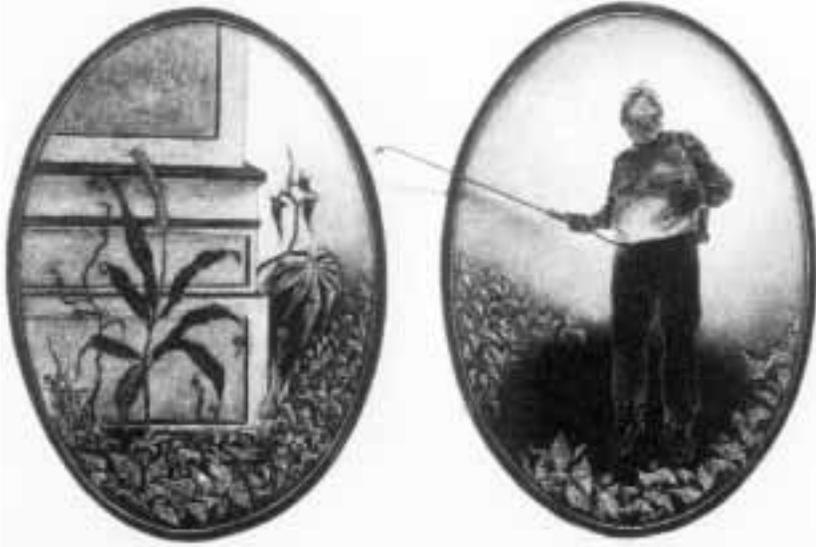
The XXth century is perceived as *the time of ecumenism* in the history of Christianity. One of the main reasons is the fact that Christianity recognized itself as a faith whose roots were spread all over the world. The Christian faith began to be witnessed in almost all the countries of the *oikoumene*, the whole inhabited earth. Christianity became truly “ecumenical” for the first time in its history.² The other reason concerns the fact that the movement for Christian unity made an enormous progress in the preceding one hundred years.

It can be maintained that the World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh (1910) was the first step in the process of the foundation of the World Council of Churches (1948). This process involved an increased ecumenical engagement of all of the Orthodox Churches as well as the later decision of the Roman Catholic Church to participate actively in the ecumenical movement, as articulated by the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965).

Ecumenism gradually became the most important project of Christian churches opening them to the challenges of modernisation. In the framework of dialogues and prayers for Christian unity the matters related to doctrinal and liturgical issues, to the interpretation of the Bible, to social thought and social action of different Christian communities, were studied and discussed. In Western Europe the progress in ecumenical dialogue gave hope to many families whose members belonged to different Christian confessions. In the United States and Canada, ecumenism promoted joint action in the area of social involvement and civil rights in different ethnic communities.

¹ The Lambeth Quadrilateral was approved by the Lambeth Conference of the Anglican Communion in 1920. The Anglican Bishops ratified what had already been proposed by the General Convention of the Protestant Episcopal Church in Chicago, USA (1886). It is a proposal about the four basic elements that the Anglican communion believes to be necessary for Church union: „(1) the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament as the revealed Word of God; (2) the Nicene Creed as the sufficient statement of the Christian faith; (3) the two sacraments – baptism and the supper of the Lord – ministered with the unfailling use of Christ’s words of ordination and of the elements ordained by Him; (4) the historic episcopate locally adapted int he methods of its administration to the varying needs of the nations and peoples called of God into the unity of his church.”

² This view is presented by Karl RAHNER and Heinrich FRIES in the third thesis of their book: *Unity of the Churches: An Actual Possibility*. New York, 1984.



The ecumenical movement evolved into a dynamic trend that could no longer be kept solely within the limits of inter-church relations. Those participating in ecumenical dialogues were very much aware of the difficulties they had to face and the misunderstandings that often created new stumbling-blocks on the path to unity. They witnessed, however, the existence of a world community of people who became friends in spite of their confessional and denominational disparities. On the basis of such friendships, trust was created and the actors committed themselves to act in concert. Even the horrors of the war did not manage to break up this community.

The Message of the First Assembly of the WCC clearly showed that even though terrible things divided the Christian churches and communities during the painful war years of 1939-1945, the delegates of the Assembly were able to state unanimously: "We intend to stay together."³

Those who took part in the ecumenical movement were not many. As a matter of fact, Christian communities committed to the work for unity were few and small. Sociological research on the ecumenical movement is still to be published, but the research that has already been done allows us to claim that ecumenically minded people have fulfilled the call to be the "salt of the earth" and the "yeast in the dough." WSCF has proved to be a sign of the times in this sense.⁴

³ Message of the first Assembly of WCC in W. A. VISSERT HOOFT (ed.), *The First Assembly of the World Council of Churches*. London, 1954.

The ecumenical movement proved to be fragile in certain cases where serious mistakes were perpetrated alienating people who were sincerely committed to work together for unity, justice and peace. However, nobody could deny that ecumenism unfolded in a surprisingly positive atmosphere with considerable outcomes from the Edinburgh Conference up to the last Assemblies of the World Council of Churches.

As time goes by, many important human endeavours lose their original enthusiasm. They can experience what Max WEBER called “the routinization of the charisma.” There is a law in social life according to which movements disappear from the society unless they become institutionalized. Therefore, in order to ensure survival in the maelstrom of historical events, movements are to be transformed into institutions. During this process, however, the movements experience not only their dynamism, but also their limits. The march forward slows down. The weight of the institution inhibits the action of those who are motivated by the spirit aiming to fulfil the original vision. The ecumenical movement is not an exception to the rule in this context.

Throughout the XXth century the ecumenical dialogue became more and more institutionalized in the life of many churches. Naturally enough, the joyful dynamism associated with the beginnings of the movement started to decrease. Today, at the beginning of the XXIst century, the ecumenical movement appears to be rather uneven. At the level of ecclesiastical institutions, ecumenism became highly structured. Ecumenical structures were created. On the local level ecumenical communities are still very active. In a way, regional ecumenical organisations prove to be even livelier than the World Council of Churches itself. The people participating in the ecumenical movement on the local level are often ready to celebrate the Eucharist together. At the same time, on the level of the World Council of Churches, the delegates of ecclesiastical bodies discuss (and some even contest) the possibility of celebrating “ecumenical worship services.”

In situations where the struggle for peace appeared to be a matter of life or death, believers of different confessions and religions were able to come together to witness their commitment against violence. In other places of the world, where migrants (many of whom are refugees) come and settle looking for better conditions of life, religious leaders and believers realise that ecumenism cannot remain confined only to the boundaries of Christianity. There is a growing claim that the ecumenical movement should become increasingly inclusive and open to inter-religious dialogue.

It has been stated that it is necessary to “keep the coherence of the ecumenical movement.”⁵ What can this statement mean? Should we pursue a certain kind of homogenisation of ecumenical communities? Or should we seek an understanding of tolerance that is appropriate to our time? The presented article discusses certain problematic elements of contemporary ecumenism. It is intended as a

⁴ See Philip POTTER – Thomas WIESER, *Seeking and Serving the Truth. The First Hundred Years of the World Student Christian Federation*. Geneva, 1997.

contribution to the ongoing ecumenical dialogue among students of different denominations, confessions and religions and more particularly in the communities of the World Student Christian Federation of today.

II. FIVE PARADOXES OF THE ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT OF OUR TIME

The Limits of the West

The modern ecumenical movement is a project that emerged from the environment of “liberal Protestantism” at its inception.⁶ It is true, as W. A. VISSER’T HOOFT writes, that one of the most important antecedents that later led to the creation of the World Council of Churches, was the Encyclical issued by the Holy Synod of the Church of Constantinople at the beginning of January 1919.⁷

Nevertheless, from the second half of the XIXth century onwards, church leaders, officials of different missionary boards, lay movements – all of whom had been born within the realm of Protestantism – started to coordinate their efforts in the view of promoting Christian unity. The modern ecumenical movement is a fruit of the development of a part of modern Protestantism that was closely linked to the modern Western culture. This “occidental” type of ecumenism is still alive. When the Eastern and Oriental Orthodox churches decided to join the movement, they affirmed this response to the challenge of modernisation in their respective ways. Later, when at the beginning of the 1960s the Roman Catholic Church officially joined the ecumenical movement, the Second Vatican Council took up the stance of *aggiornamento*. This step was understood as the acceptance of modernity by the Roman Catholic Church. This implies that the modern ecumenical movement was born in Western Christian communities, above all in Western missionary movements and Western lay movements.

As it has been noted above, one of the main transformations of Christianity that took place in the last century was its commitment to become truly *ecumenical* and *global*. The missionary leaders’ motto at the beginning of the 1900s was “the evangelisation of the world in this generation.” Even if the majority of the world population does not adhere to Christianity, Christian churches and communities are present in almost all the countries of the world. Furthermore, as Philip JENKINS indicated in his recent book *The Next Christendom*, churches are turning more dynamic and in the “South” they continue to grow.⁸ In the last quarter of the past century Christian communities of the South gave clear signs of approaching God through new types of prayer, new liturgies (rooted in the living context of the community), new songs, new theologies (with a clear emphasis on the practice rather than on traditional doctrines) and new ecclesial structures. Numerous

⁵ *The Common Understanding and Vision of the World Council of Churches*. Geneva, 1997.

⁶ Those theological expressions of Protestant communities are meant here that are not part of „conservative Evangelical” tradition or Protestant fundamentalism. The theology of Karl BARTH, as well as of Paul TILLICH and Emil BRUNNER is part of the mentioned trend.

⁷ Encyclical of the Ecumenical Patriarchate: *Unto the Churches of Christ Everywhere* (1920). In Michael KINNAMON – Brian E. COPE (eds.), *The Ecumenical Movement. An Anthology of Key Texts and Voices*. Geneva – Grand Rapids, 1997. 11-14.

observers have claimed recently that the centres of decision making in Christian communities ceased to be confined to the North (or North-West) and have started to move southwards.

The “institutional” ecumenical movement, however, continues to be predominantly Western. Church leaders participating in ecumenical gatherings come mostly from the West. It is a fact that Christian communities in North America continue to give witness to their vigour and vitality; however, it is necessary to state that most of these churches are conservative and manifest an undeniable distrust towards ecumenism. When observing the current situation of Christian churches and communities in Western Europe, one faces a dilemma. Most Europeans confess they are Christian, but their participation in church events is decreasing. Both the number of faithful who attend church services and the amount of financial contributions that ecclesial institutions receive from their members are diminishing. It is to be mentioned in this context, however, that on certain occasions churches manage to organise large-size gatherings and meetings collecting thousands or even millions of people, as it was the case with Catholic youth pilgrimages. The community of Taizé in Burgundy (France) continues to be a beacon for ecumenically minded young Christians.

This is, however, not the case in the so-called South. In the same way as new forms of Christianity emerged in Africa, Latin America, the Caribbeans, Asia and Pacific, new types of ecumenical relations developed in the mentioned regions, too. Less emphasis is placed on traditional doctrines and more attention is paid to the spiritual needs of the people. Theological debates arose in connection with topics as the evangelization of non-Christians or the reaching out to the baptized who do not seem to follow the moral standards indicated by churches. This new type of ecumenism looks neither to Rome (which has become the true centre of ecumenical and interreligious dialogue since the 1980^s) nor to Geneva (where ecumenical organizations are located, e.g. the World Council of Churches) in order to develop new styles of ecumenical dialogue, namely those in which divisions are not as important as the common action in the service of the people, particularly of the “poor.”

It seems that the international ecumenical movement has not yet become fully aware of the mentioned shift. In this transformation a tension is clearly manifest between the West-centered ecumenism and the new “peripheral” expressions of the search for unity. Furthermore, these “Southern” ecumenical expressions seem to be more open to dialogue with communities of other faiths.

Minorities and Masses

The ecumenical movement was carried forward by the action of committed minorities who were able to form new communities of faith. It is a fact that these small ecumenical communities were able to create projects that went beyond the limits of their own confessions and denominations. Ecumenism did not originate as a mass movement.

⁸ See Philip JENKINS, *The Next Christendom*. New York, 2002.

This situation provoked certain ecumenical mentors to think about methodologies that would prevent any forms of “elitism” that at times characterized some of the ecumenical activities. Different ways of actions were devised: visiting teams that sought to go beyond the boundaries of church leaderships and church bureaucracy, motivating the grassroot constituencies of the churches to open up to ecumenical visions. However, at the top of “institutional ecumenism”, the same people gathered again and again. In this way the ecumenical movement found itself hesitant and fluctuating between becoming a movement of masses and becoming a movement of concerned minorities. There are two points that should be taken into consideration in connection with this paradox. One is the ecclesiological and ecclesial dimension of the ecumenical movement. Some churches maintain that they are the “true body of Christ”, or that “the Church subsists in their structures.” Other churches still persist to claim that they are more than “ecclesial communities” and that the marks of the Church of Christ are also present in them (although in more or less perfect way).

One way of overcoming these contradictions was to perceive the Church as a communion.⁹ This proved, however, unfeasible, especially when the dialogue on “communion” was carried out on the basis of dogmatic assumptions. But when ecumenism is debated as a matter of doctrines, it can be easily put into a freezer! With hibernation we cannot go too far in our way towards unity. Things change when we realize that ecumenical relations form a part of the pastoral life of the church. In this article the concept of “pastoral” relates to the process of shaping the body of Christ in the life of Christian communities (Galatians 4,19). This path of *conformatio Christi* is not a matter of doctrine, but an expression of “the life in the Spirit.” (As a matter of fact, I believe that the fourth and the fifth chapter, of that Epistle, where the Apostle writes about the Spirit, the pneumatic and the institutional, corporative, structural dimensions of the Christian communities are inseparable.)

Furthermore, this “pastoral practice” is not – at least at the beginning of the process - an action of the whole community, but rather a concern of few believers who try to spread the spirit of unity among the other members of the Christian *koinonia*. It is important for the ecumenical movement to recognize that the way to unity is an expression of the Spirit of God, who is like the wind - “blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes” (John 3,8) - even if it necessarily includes doctrinal dialogue. Throughout the history of humankind, institutions have tried again and again to understand and control (mostly unconsciously) the actions of the Spirit. One of the most prominent ways to do this was by means of the primacy of dogma over the concrete life of the faith community. The paradox is obvious and must be overcome by giving priority to the pastoral dimension of ecumenism over the doctrinal one.

The second dimension is sociological – the modern ecumenical movement is a

⁹ This was the theme of the Faith and Order conference at Santiago de Compostela, Spain, in 1993.

movement of concerned minorities. It is necessary to make a distinction between “minority” and “elite” in this context. As an example, the movement of Jesus was constituted by only a small number of people, although it addressed itself to the whole of Israel and to the neighboring places. When Jesus died those who were waiting for the manifestation of the power of the risen Christ were very few.

The first chapters of the Book of Acts give witness to the existence of a tiny minority of disciples who were part of the movement. It is true that crowds followed Jesus, recognized that he had an authority (charisma) unlike the masters of the law. Nevertheless, the teachings of Jesus are addressed to the small minority of disciples, and not to the *ochlos*. This small group of disciples was called to awaken the people. They played a role comparable to the animators of cultural circles who should fulfill what Paulo FREIRE described as the “pedagogy of freedom, pedagogy of the oppressed.”

There is, however, a problem we are facing – the difference between a “concerned minority” and an “elite” can be very tiny. A minority can be tempted to develop an awareness of being an avant-garde, which happened to the Pharisees at the time of Jesus. In order not to fall into this trap, it is elementary to keep a lively dialogue between the minority and the majority. The ecumenical movement proved to be able to keep the balance many times. On the other hand there were also instances when it succumbed to the temptation of power.

The present general secretary of the World Council of Churches, Rev. Dr. Konrad RAISER was right in noting that the movement should emphasize the practice of communication, not in a virtual way, but on an existential level.¹⁰ Philip POTTER recognized the same need when reiterating that ecumenical relations are like those indicated by Martin BUBER in the book *I and Thou*.¹¹ In other words, a minority can avoid becoming an elite if its members listen attentively to the messages coming from the people living at the grassroots. It is always necessary to listen critically to the people when they respond to the question: “Who do the people say that the Son of Man is?” Nevertheless, not always the people’s response is the right one.

Individualization of Religious Experience

The tension between the prevailing trend of “individualisation of religious experiences” and the ways of celebrating characteristic of ecumenical communities represents another paradox. At this point it must be recognized that when people are moved by the Spirit of God to praise the mystery of God’s being, nobody can stop them. We cannot put barriers to the inspiration of the Spirit. Participation in an ecumenical worship has always been a matter of joy as well as of pain for those who have been committed to ecumenism. Joy, because believers of different traditions were able to join in common worship; pain, because some, in full loyalty to their institutions, could not participate.

One of the main problems of today is that religious experience is more and more

¹⁰ Konrad RAISER, *Ecumenism in Transition. A Paradigm Shift in the Ecumenical Movement?* Geneva, 1991.

¹¹ Philip POTTER, *Life in all its Fullness*. Geneva. 44–49.

a matter of individual consciousness. The decline of institutions goes hand in hand with the increase of individualistic religiosity. It is necessary to emphasize that this process does not concern solely Western societies, it has a global character.

André DROOGERS, an anthropologist of the Free University of Amsterdam, put this paradox into well-defined terms: "The process of institutional erosion represents a policy problem for the churches' leaders. Paradoxically, by emphasizing individual conversion, personal faith and freedom of choice, churches seem to have admitted a Trojan horse, thus creating the conditions for their own demise. What is more, individualism finds part of its roots in Christianity."¹² Very often, the individualization of religious experience is connected with a formulation of a personal religious synthesis, which is then pegged as syncretism, generally disliked by ecclesiastical institutions.

The new situation presents new challenges to the ecumenical movement, as individuals search to formulate their personal synthesis by taking into consideration not only the traditional symbols of their faith but also their own cultural values and customs. There is an increasing number of individuals who remain open to ecumenism in spite of the fact that the institutions they belong to either are not ecumenical or do not pay sufficient attention to the ecumenical dialogue.

Macro-Ecumenism

There are ecumenical circles in which the claim for a "wider ecumenism" is growing increasingly powerful.¹³ Believers, who were captured by the striving for Christian unity, push the question of "the others" into the spotlight, asking whether the ecumenical movement should include them as well. On the other hand, however, fundamentalist groups are formed that strongly oppose any contact with "the others." These intolerant groups are often manipulated by extremist political forces, thus causing a clear break in the relations within the same religious family. Those who practice more inclusive forms of ecumenism frequently fall under the criticism of the authorities of ecclesiastical bodies who are concerned with keeping the *depositum fidei* of their traditions as correct as possible. Nonetheless, the challenge of the increasing practice of wider ecumenism is there and cannot be ignored. It is part of the development of the *oikoumene*.

Ecumenism in Modern Contexts

In the last twenty years a growing influence of clergy has been experienced, mainly in the practice of the official and institutionalized ecumenism. The modern movement for Christian unity was originally above all a concern of the laity. The growing authority of the clergy in ecumenical affairs often pushes laywomen and laymen to the "individualization of ecumenical practices." Of course, there are numerous ecumenical programmes attended by lay persons. However, many of these are "profes-

¹² André DROOGERS, *The Individualization of Religious Experience*. Written as a contribution to the work of the Research Group of the Ecumenical Institute of Bossey on "Religious Life Today and its Challenges to the Ecumenical Movement" (unpublished).

¹³ Roman Catholic bishop Msgr. Pedro CASALDÁLIGA of the Diocese of São Felix de Araguaia, Brasil, has been one of the most outspoken Latin American church leaders in favour of this conception of wider ecumenism.

sional ecumenists” in the service of institutions. The challenge of our times is to make ecumenism appealing once again for the educated and activist-minded laity.

There are other aspects influencing the current situation of ecumenism – the wide-spread feeling that nothing new is happening, no steps are made to give new strength to the believers working for unity, and thus ecumenical organizations are less supported with financial contributions coming from the public. These paradoxes call for a renewal of the ecumenical movement.

III. HOW TO MOVE ON?

One of the lessons to be learnt from the history of religious communities is that when a call for renewal is made there are elements of the past that should be reaffirmed; awareness of the present dilemmas has to be raised in order to act appropriately; and certain new trends are to be followed.

Strong Piety

What should be reaffirmed? The ecumenical movement (so often criticized as being worldly, “mundane”) has been an expression of strong piety. People as Jean Henri DUNANT, founder of the International Red Cross, who came from YMCA; John R. MOTT, founder of WSCF; J. H. OLDHAM; William TEMPLE; George BELL; Kathleen BLISS; Madeleine BAROT; Suzanne DE DIETRICH; D.T. NILES; Pierre MAURY; Philip POTTER; and many others were and are people who lived out their ecumenical commitment in a close connection with their sincere piety: practice of daily prayer, of constant biblical study, dialogue with others and careful service of those in need. These elements were essentially present in their existence. There cannot be a future of any movement in Christianity unless it is grounded on deep piety and a faith anchored on a strong rock.

Vital Awareness of Mission

The Gospel of Jesus of Nazareth has been brought almost to the “end of the earth.” Nevertheless, there are many people who do not even try to live a life faithful to the message of the Gospel. Furthermore, legalism still remains a wide-spread phenomenon although the call to *metanoia* presented by Jesus is brought to every human longing to enter the Kingdom that is “near.” Mission is not only about “the way and the how”, but above all about the source, *missio Dei*, about the process through which God becomes human and assumes the life of the most deprived and oppressed people. One of the most crucial questions of today appears to be - how to preach the gospel in the modern world ruled by the power of money?

New Understanding of Ecumenical Social Ethics

It would be illusory to presume that there is “one” ecumenical social ethic. Ecumenical communities commit themselves to overcome violence, to peace, to social justice, to defend and promote human rights, to respect the rights of the

environment in different contexts. Ecumenical social ethics is always contextual, and it has to be so. However, there is a challenge of diversity – what are the common elements of the social engagement of ecumenical communities in their resistance against neo-liberal globalization in South Africa and South America? What are the common elements in the struggle of the North Americans and the British for more open and inclusive societies?

Nevertheless, social ethics should be considered an essential element in the actions and reflections of the ecumenical movement. This also means that ecumenical social ethics is not an uncommitted one: it calls for action. Throughout the XXth century, the ecumenical movement gave witness of its different engagements and commitments. Ecumenical social ethics always takes side. Living out social ethics is the only way to be faithful to the Gospel of Jesus of Nazareth, the “good news to the poor” and the “liberation of the oppressed.”

Faith and Order

Bishop George BRENT, the founder of *Faith and Order*, formulated a program that has been put into practice step-by-step. However, the way proposed by Bishop BRENT has not yet been fully fulfilled. The carrying out of this program presents numerous difficulties. It is so especially in connection with the second half of the last century when new churches focused primarily on elaborating their own particular traditions, new liturgies were celebrated, new streams of theology appeared. There is no doubt that the “faith and order line” should be kept. Nevertheless, it is challenged to take into account the new situation of the churches in changing Christianity.

IV. THREE SUGGESTIONS FOR FINDING MEANING IN OUR COMPLEXITIES

Inclusive Ecclesiological and Theological Dialogue

Our ecumenical reflections cannot be reduced to traditional forms of faith. There are new forms that have come into being: Pentecostal and Charismatic, new inter-religious relations as fruits of the daily sharing with other religious communities; issues of intolerance towards ecumenical discussions. The women’s revolution (which in my understanding is the most important process of the change that affects all the societies of the world) deserves a priority in the new ecumenical dialogue. These issues are, however, not to be handled as mathematical items; quotas are necessary, indeed to revert and correct injustices. However, we need to go beyond quotas, to listen to women and consider their claims. Even if they, at times, might seem to oppose some of the traditions of our religious families.

Global Ecumenical Constellation

When realizing that the centers of Christian faith are no longer in the West or North, it seems to be necessary to begin searching for a *new world* or a global ecumenical constellation. We cannot reduce ecumenism only to the traditional

forms of Christianity; the time is ripe to widen the circles. In the contemporary “networks society” there is not merely one network in which we are bound to participate as individuals or associations, but rather several networks are open simultaneously.¹⁴ There seems to be a vital opportunity to bring different networks together (e.g. in a form of an “ecumenical parliament”). This could enable ecumenical communities to listen to one another in a more concentrated way.

The *coming-together* should not focus on an establishment of a central power deciding upon what should be done, but rather on the motivation to stay on the ground of dialogue. “All in each place” should be linked more closely to “remain together” in order to make us realize that all of us are called to be one people of God despite the fact that we come from different families, cultures, and traditions. This potential line of action has already been suggested by Philip POTTER when he envisaged the ecumenical movement as a platform for a universal dialogue of cultures¹⁵. The *oikoumene*, the whole inhabited earth, where the faithful are called to witness the presence of God in the midst of our life, must be the main concern of the ecumenical movement. But how to form one people of God living in the diversity of the different cultures, ethnic traditions and identities of those who are part of the whole humankind?

Deciding the Line of Action

The strength of the ecumenical movement has been based on the seriousness of its analysis and its search for adequate implementations of its theoretical findings ever since its inception. This rigor must continue to exist. The focal point is not the imposing of one common line, but rather the clearing up of the complex labyrinth in which we find ourselves today, sharing our analyses of this complexity with other ecumenical and religious communities, thus enriching their own decision making processes. This supportive work of the ecumenical movement was highly valued in the past. Personally, I am convinced that the World Student Christian Federation still has a vital role to play in this field.

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¹⁴ Manuel CASTELLS: *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture*. Cambridge, 1996.

¹⁵ Philip POTTER, op. cit. 154–164.

Julio de SANTA ANA:

El movimiento ecuménico ante las encrucijadas

El movimiento ecuménico experimenta varias tensiones y, al comenzar el Siglo XXI, puede ser caracterizado por varias paradojas. Al mismo tiempo que el ecumenismo oficial (o institucional, protagonizado por las instituciones eclesiásticas, sean occidentales u orientales) da muestras de estancamiento, no ocurre asó en lugares donde el Cristianismo testimonia ser motivado por un fuerte entusiasmo y dinamismo. La parálisis (que para algunos es agotamiento) de las instituciones eclesiásticas tradicionales contrasta con la práctica de una “imaginación ecuménica” entre comunidades e iglesias que se abren a una concepción más amplia del ecumenismo, que corresponda al creciente pluralismo religioso que se observa en nuestras sociedades. El artículo plantea una serie de puntos a través de los que el autor intenta lanzar un debate, que entiende necesario. La intención del autor es abrir un debate, en el que las comunidades de estudiantes cristianos participen, desafíen e inspiren a quienes participan en otros niveles del movimiento ecuménico.

Julio de SANTA ANA:

Le mouvement œcuménique au croisement de chemins

Le mouvement œcuménique est soumis à certaines tensions et renferme en ce début de XXI^e siècle divers paradoxes. C'est ainsi qu'alors que l'œcuménisme officiel (ou institutionnel, préconisé par les institutions ecclésiastiques, occidentales ou orientales) montre des signes de fatigue, le christianisme témoigne ailleurs d'une grande motivation, toute enthousiasme et dynamisme. La paralysie (fatigue, pour certains) des institutions ecclésiastiques traditionnelles contraste avec "l'imagination œcuménique" de certaines communautés et Églises, qui adoptent un concept plus large d'œcuménisme, mieux adapté au pluralisme religieux croissant de nos sociétés. L'article met en avant certains aspects à travers lesquels l'auteur essaye de promouvoir une discussion qu'il juge nécessaire. L'auteur prétend lancer un débat ou il invite les associations chrétiennes d'étudiants à participer afin de défier et inspirer ceux qui participent à d'autres niveaux du mouvement œcuménique.