

The Ecumenical Movement

Sources

Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement (1991)

Stephen Neill, *Brothers of the Faith* (1960)

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, "The Basis of Christian Unity," pp. 118-63, in *Knowing the Times* (1989)

Edward Panosian, *The World Council of Churches* (1983)

I. Introduction

A. Definition

1. Historic: *ecumenical* = "pertaining to the entire world"
2. 20th century: Movements toward church union

B. Types of Union

1. Organic Union: complete merging into a single body
 - a. Same Denominational Family: United Methodist Church
 - b. Across Denominational Lines: United Church of Canada (Methodist, Congregationalist, most Presbyterians)
2. Federation
 - a. Denominational alliances (e.g., Baptist World Alliance)
 - b. Interdenominational federations (NCC & WCC)

II. World Council of Churches

A. Roots: World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh (1910) [González, 438-40]

1. Birth of modern ecumenical movement
2. Included theological "diversity" but still a strong conservative element
3. Led to International Missionary Council (1921)
4. Inspired conferences that led to the WCC
 - a. Conference on Life and Work
 - 1) Outlined social, economic, and political issues that churches should address
 - 2) Motto: "Doctrine Divides, but Service Unites."
 - b. Conference on Faith and Order: Tried to reconcile matters of theology & polity

B. Formation [González, 512-19]

1. Founded in 1948 in Amsterdam
2. "Basis": "The WCC is a fellowship of churches which confess the Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour according to the Scriptures and therefore seek to fulfill together their common calling to the glory of the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit" (New Delhi, 1961)

C. Critique

1. Chief failure: Doctrinal tolerance
2. Advanced liberal/radical positions politically

III. Vatican II (1962-65) [González, 442-46]

A. History

1. Called by Pope John XXIII; finished by Paul VI
 - a. John XXIII opened w/ a call for "renewal"
 - b. Pope John: "The substance of the ancient doctrine of the deposit of faith is one thing, and the way in which it is presented is another"
 - 1) Catholic liberals emphasized modern presentation
 - 2) Traditionalists emphasized the unchanging deposit of truth

2. Included (for the first time) Protestant observers
3. Enacted several procedural & liturgical reforms (e.g., new liturgy in vernacular, new translation of the Bible)
4. Interfaith Aspects
 - a. Called Protestants & Orthodox “separated brethren”
 - b. Called for liberty of worship
 - c. Allowed participation in ecumenical dialogue
 - d. Fostered “evangelical cobelligerency” → evangelicals working w/ Catholics on moral issues (e.g., abortion)

B. Evaluation

1. Dominant View: A great step forward in bringing RCC up to date
2. Doctrinally, however, little change
3. Created some *formal* change & opened ecumenical dialogue

IV. Conservative Responses

A. General Observations

1. Ecumenism an issue in the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy
2. Some conservative reunion has taken place (e.g., PCA & RPCES)
3. Some ecumenical reversal has occurred (e.g., Global Methodist Church)

B. Examples

1. Carl McIntire
 - a. Bible Presbyterian founder, radio preacher, political activist
 - b. Organizations Founded
 - 1) American Council of Christian Churches (1941)
 - 2) International Council of Christian Churches (1948)
2. National Association of Evangelicals (NAE; 1942)
 - a. A leading voice of the New Evangelicalism
 - b. Represents a more inclusivist philosophy to McIntire’s exclusivist approach
3. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones
 - a. Leading anti-ecumenical voice in Britain
 - b. Participated in ecumenical discussions
 - c. Argued there can be unity (and true union) only in the truth
4. World Congress of Fundamentalists (1976)
 - a. Led by Bob Jones Jr. & Ian Paisley
 - b. Called for ideal of interdenominational Fundamentalism
 - c. Launched a series of congresses
 - d. Hampered by divisions and faded over time

C. Scriptural Considerations

1. There *is* a fundamental Christian unity (Eph. 4:4-6)
2. Unity vs. Discipline
 - a. One cannot ignore unity (Ps. 133; Eph. 4:3—“keep”)
 - b. One cannot ignore discipline (I Cor. 5:11-13)
3. Division vs. Cooperation
 - a. Schism is a sin (I Cor. 12:25) → Martyn Lloyd-Jones: Schism is “division in the true visible church about matters that are not sufficient to justify division or separation.”
 - b. Cooperation w/ unbelievers is a sin (II Cor. 6:14–7:1)

4. Not all “churches” are true churches (Rev. 2:5; 3:16)
5. Doctrine is primary (Acts 2:42)
6. Unity involves an essential agreement (John 17:21)