



Faith and Order

The Beginning of the Movement
and Its Development

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One of the biblically and theologically based convictions of the ecumenical movement is that visible unity belonging to the essence of the church. The church is a sign, a sacrament and a foretaste of the unity that is God's will and purpose for all things. The church is called to offer the world a glimpse of an alternative to the conflicts and division that people experience in society no matter what that society is or where or when it is.

The quest to be that 'lived alternative' takes us to the heart of the Faith and Order agenda – to the heart of what Faith & Order is about.

The task of Faith and Order is expressed in these terms:

To call the churches to the goal of visible unity in one faith and in one Eucharistic fellowship expressed in worship and in common life in Christ, and to advance towards that unity in order that the world may believe. *Article 3 of the Faith and Order by-laws*

The purpose of this paper is to trace the history of the F&O Movement, as well as outline the current directions of Faith and Order, and what may lie ahead in the future.

So, the history

Edinburgh 1910

Like the whole Ecumenical Movement, the story of Faith and Order begins in Edinburgh, 1910. It may seem strange to say that since one of the pre-conference agreements leading up to Edinburgh was the agreement not to discuss questions of difference in doctrine and church-structure - faith and order issues. It was a tactical decision to get the conference even to happen. Some churches, and particularly some Anglicans, were refusing to attend unless the faith and order questions were excluded, and since the aim of the conference was coordination and cooperation, the conference organisers wanted as wide a participation as possible. So, no faith and order! But it did beg the questions about what kept the churches apart, and how to move from disunity to unity.

The roots of Faith and Order

But at Edinburgh things happened. The Anglicans who were gathered there, met daily to celebrate the Eucharist at St John the Evangelist Scottish Episcopal Church. They became increasingly aware of the discrepancy between the growing experience of unity at the conference, and the Anglican practice at the time that made it impossible to celebrate and receive the Eucharist with other Christians. That sense of "wrongness" impelled them to seek

to remove whatever issues of faith and order kept believers apart in the Eucharist. And Faith and Order was born.

One of those Anglicans was Charles Brent, a missionary bishop of the US Episcopal Church working in the Philippines. The idea of a Faith and Order conference began with Bishop Brent, who made the link between the Edinburgh Conference and its call for Christian unity, and the need to resolve issues of faith and order in the divided churches. He recognised that the pre-conference agreement not to discuss questions of difference was a good one at the time, but that such questions of faith and order did need an appropriate forum, and that in such a forum they could be discussed and resolved. Of Edinburgh, he said:

I was converted. I learned that something was working that was not of man in that conference; that the Spirit of God ... was preparing a new era in the history of Christianity.

At the end of the Edinburgh Conference, Brent said:

During these past days a new vision has been unfolded to us. But whenever God gives a vision, He also points to some new responsibility, and you and I, when we leave this assembly, will go away with some fresh duties to perform.

For Brent, the unity of the church was not an option, but a gospel imperative, linked with the very mission of the Church.

Bishop Brent returned to the USA and in October 1910, gained a unanimous resolution of the General Convention of the Episcopal Church calling for a world conference of all the churches “for the consideration of questions pertaining to the Faith and Order of the Church of Christ”. This was an action of a church – not a theological faculty or missionary society as Edinburgh had been, but a church! As Günther Gassmann, a former Director of Faith and Order, insisted: “Faith and Order was and is a movement of the churches”.

That was 1910. The first F&O conference was held in Lausanne in 1927. In the years between, there was growing support especially in the wake of the World War I. The so-called mainline Protestant Churches were very interested. In 1920 the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Constantinople sent a powerful letter to the churches, with a call for Christian unity and sent representatives to Lausanne. In the same year, 1920, the Lambeth Conference of Anglican bishops made their famous appeal for Christian unity. A letter was sent to all Roman Catholic bishops in 1919, followed up by a visit to Pope Benedict XV, but the Pope politely declined, and expressed his good wishes, but understood Christian unity, at that time, to be a matter of returning to the Roman Catholic Church.

Lausanne set the pattern, and the methodology of Faith and Order ever since has been theological dialogue: informed conversations about church-dividing issues among/between churches, where theologians appointed by the churches seek to find common ground, mutual understanding, and to discover consensus or agreement on such issues that will further the

visible unity of the Church.

Concern about unity, of course, and issues of F&O were not new to 1910 or 1927 for that matter. Sustained theological reflection on unity and disunity is found in both the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures.

What is new about the Faith and Order questions from 1910 is the desire to re-establish unity by resolving theological issues that separate churches from one another in the present, even if their roots may lie in the past. And from 1910 onwards, the Faith and Order agenda has been profoundly linked to mission.

The early leaders of Faith and Order were convinced that the goal of common Christian witness and mission could not happen without resolving the divisions over faith and order that prevented the churches from acting together. From the great insight of Edinburgh 1910, people recognised that the division of the church betrays the will and prayer of Jesus “that they all may be one” and is a counter-witness to the reconciling love of God in Christ.

The words “Faith and Order” have a decidedly less friendly ring now than they did in 1910. Perhaps because politicians are so concerned with ‘law and order’! Is the WCC Faith and Order Commission some kind of theological police force? No, ‘faith and order’ is about what the Church believes and how it structures itself. By “faith” is meant belief: what is the meaning of salvation? How do we express the nature and person of Jesus? What is our understanding of the Holy Trinity? How do we read the Bible? What are the forms of the creed that we use? These great questions of the Christian faith have actually been the easiest ones on which to find common ground and mutual agreement. ‘Order’ refers to how the churches are ‘ordered’, relates to words such as ‘ordination’ or ‘holy orders’. What are the church’s orders of ministries: bishop, presbyter and deacon, or the single minister of word and sacrament? How are Christians initiated into the life of the church? Where are decisions made, and by whom? These sorts of questions of “order” are as divisive as questions relating to the faith of the churches.

Without the Faith and Order strand in the fabric of the ecumenical movement, the quest for Christian unity would be without one of its foundational pillars.

Developments of Faith and Order and Ecumenical Methodology

A way of looking at the progress of Faith and Order is a brief introduction to the five World Conferences: Lausanne, 1927; Edinburgh, 1937; Lund, 1952; Montreal, 1963; Santiago de Compostela, 1993.

Lausanne 1927: The first World Conference on Faith and Order. The number of churches represented was 127, and 400 people from all over the world attended. The gathering included

Orthodox patriarchs and bishops, as well as church leaders and scholars from most of the Christian world. There were even two unofficial Roman Catholic observers.

A statement of purpose for the Conference said: “to register the apparent level of fundamental agreements within the conference and the grave points of disagreements remaining”. This is how Faith and Order began – with what has been called the ‘comparative method’ of theological dialogue – where I state my church’s position and you state yours and we see what is common and what is different. It made possible the opening of dialogue between the churches.

That first Conference set the faith and order agenda for the future – the four core areas of work: (i) the nature of the Church (ecclesiology); (ii) a common confession of Christian faith; (iii) agreement on ministry; and (iv) agreement on the sacraments – all within the overarching call to unity.

The conviction coming out of Lausanne was that unity was possible, and within reach. These are their words to the churches in 1927:

God’s Spirit has been in the midst of us. It was He who called us hither. His presence has been manifest in our worship, our deliberations and our whole fellowship. He has discovered us to one another. He has enlarged our horizons, quickened our understanding, and enlivened our hope. We have dared and God has justified our daring. We can never be the same again. Our deep thankfulness must find expression in sustained endeavour to share the visions vouchsafed us here with those smaller home groups where our lot is cast.

Edinburgh 1937: Again over 400 participants, representing 122 churches, met. The particular contribution of this conference was the articulation of several different visions of the unity of the Church: ❶ the unity of mutual recognition; ❷ the unity of cooperative action; and ❸ corporate union.

The Conference also agreed, despite some opposing voices, to unite the Faith and Order movement with the movement for Life and Work “to form a council of churches” which eventually led to the World Council of Churches (WCC). Faith and Order was to be a constitutive element of the WCC from the beginning.

From the 1937 Conference, an important principle for Faith and Order work was articulated “... to draw Churches out of isolation into *conference*, in which none is to be asked to be disloyal to or to compromise its convictions, but to seek to explain them to others while seeking to understand their points of view. Irreconcilable differences are to be recorded as honestly as agreements”.

Lund 1952: Faith and Order made a clear shift in methodology at Lund. There was a sense that the comparative approach to doing Faith and Order work was not making progress – the

way of comparing and contrasting differences and similarities. At Lund, the methodology became one of seeking unity in faith, by proposing consensus or convergence statements to the churches. They moved from the comparing controversial positions in the present to get behind them to a common biblical and Christological basis. Those present said that “as we come closer to Christ, we come closer to one another”. So, the new direction was to say together what we can say together, namely, a “convergence” methodology. In ‘A Word to the Churches’, the Conference observed:

we can make no real advance toward unity if we only compare our several conceptions on the nature of the Church and the traditions in which they are embodied ... We need therefore to penetrate behind our divisions to a deeper and richer understanding of the mystery of the God-given union of Christ and his Church.

It was at Lund, and by Faith and Order, that the famous principle for acting ecumenically was proposed, in a single question:

Should not our churches ask themselves whether they are showing sufficient eagerness to enter into conversations with other churches, and whether they should act together in all matters except those in which deep difference of conviction compel them to act separately?

Montreal 1963: This was the only World Conference on Faith and Order to have taken place outside Europe, although meetings of the commission take place all over the world. Montreal in 1963 was no accident. At that time, Quebec was considered one of the jewels of the Roman Catholic Church. Within the wake of the Second Vatican Council, this location signalled a new relationship between the Roman Catholic Church and the Ecumenical Movement generally, and Faith and Order in particular. While the Roman Catholic Church only officially became a member of Faith and Order in 1968, Roman Catholics were much involved in Montreal 1963, in advance of the Vatican II Decree of Ecumenism in 1964.

The questions raised at Montreal were hermeneutical ones, especially the interpretation of Scripture. It discussed the divisive issue between ‘Scripture’ and ‘Tradition’, helping to overcome the old contrast between *sola scriptura* and *Scripture and Tradition*. It did so by proposing a much broader understanding of what tradition means. It distinguished between ‘Tradition’ (the Gospel itself, transmitted from generation to generation in and by the Church), ‘tradition’ (the processes by which this handing on takes place) and ‘traditions’ (particular confessional groupings; and the diverse forms in which the Tradition is traditioned). While this way of making the distinctions has its limitations (it works in some languages but not in others), the work at Montreal was particularly important for the way it helped resolve many aspects of the post-Reformation problems of relating the scriptures to tradition. It opened the way to greater and more productive theological dialogue.

Santiago de Compostela, 1993: The fifth world conference – and the first to have RC members.

It was there that Archbishop Desmond Tutu said that “Apartheid is too strong for a divided church”. In other words, for the churches to make a difference to such an evil as apartheid, they had to be united.

This world conference set the agenda of Faith and Order to the present day, particularly in the area of ecclesiology. It brought the historic Faith and Order agenda into deeper conversation with the classic Life and Work themes of justice, peace, and the integrity of creation. The later work on ecclesiology and ethics flows from Santiago.

There was a call for a more contextual approach to Faith and Order, particularly by theologians from Latin America. The younger theologians came to identify three approaches – the old comparative methodology, the consensus/convergence methodology, and contextual theology – as approaches Faith and Order needs to engage with – that they are not mutually exclusive, but simply different methodologies.

A significant contribution of the conference was the importance it gave to the understanding of visible unity as *koinonia* (already expressed in ‘The Canberra Statement’ from the WCC Seventh Assembly, 1991) and sharing in the *koinonia* of the life of the Trinity.

In their message from the conference the delegates declared their “renewed commitment and enthusiasm for the ecumenical vision” and went on to say to the churches: “*there is no turning back*, either from the goal of visible unity or from the single ecumenical movement that unites concern for the unity of the Church and concern for engagement in the struggles of the world”.

Faith and Order as a Commission within the WCC

Faith and Order has been one of the pillars of the WCC from its inception in 1948. From that time, what had been the Faith and Order committee became the 120-member Commission on F&O served by a secretariat in Geneva. Its membership includes the member churches of the WCC, but it also goes beyond. Significant is the presence of Roman Catholic theologians from 1963, and the full formal membership of the Roman Catholic Church since 1968. Other traditions which are also not members of the WCC are present, including some Pentecostal and Evangelical churches. Former moderator of the Commission on F&O (1976-1983) and theologian of the Church of Greece, Professor Nikos Nissiotis, remarked that the F&O Commission is the most comprehensive forum for theological ecumenism in the world; it still is. And the presence of the Orthodox theologians has been crucial to F&O’s life from the beginning. They rescued F&O from becoming simply a pan-Protestant movement; they have shaped it profoundly, and in such a way that churches of Reformation traditions have been able to reach remarkable agreement amongst themselves, and with the Roman Catholic Church – putting dialogue in a broader context.

Achievements of Faith and Order

Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry: This is the best known of all ecumenical texts. It addresses three of the historic church dividing issues – disagreement on Christian Initiation, Eucharist and ordained ministry. Serious work towards a consensus on these issues began in the 1960s and culminated at the meeting in Lima (1982) with the statement *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (*BEM*). It received the unanimous support of the 120-member Commission. The text was the product of dialogue on a number of levels. First, there was the multilateral dialogue within the commission itself. Then there was the dialogue between the Commission and the churches, and also the bilateral dialogues between churches which were often working on the same topics, but from the more narrow and specific perspective of two traditions. The Lima text is not yet a consensus document but represents significant theological convergence on these matters.

The text is not a complete theological treatment of baptism, eucharist and ministry. It concentrates on “those aspects of the theme that have been directly or indirectly related to the problems of mutual recognition leading to unity”. The main text demonstrates the major areas of theological convergence – what the churches can say together about these issues; the added commentaries either indicate historical differences that have been overcome or identify disputed issues still in need of further research and reconciliation – suggesting possible means by which greater unity might be reached on these issues.

Günther Gassmann identified *BEM* as “the most widely distributed, discussed and responded to text in the history of the ecumenical movement”. It has gone through 39 printings and been translated into 40 languages, and there are an estimated million copies in circulation, not to mention its availability on-line. Over 190 churches responded to *BEM*, and Faith and Order published these responses in six hefty volumes.

Even if you have not read *BEM*, it is highly likely that you receive it most Sundays. This is so because so many of those involved in the *BEM* process were also engaged in liturgical renewal in their churches. The worship/prayer books of many churches were being revised as *BEM* was being prepared. There was an order of celebration of the Eucharist based on *BEM* called the Lima Liturgy. It was seldom used, but it became the model for a whole series of Eucharistic liturgies and service books from 1982 to the present. It is no wonder that there is a family resemblance in the way our churches celebrate the Eucharist, in terms of the shape of the liturgy, the common lectionary, and common Eucharistic prayers.

Christian Initiation: the text challenged many assumptions about Baptism. For instance, in terms of pastoral practice it challenged the place of indiscriminate infant baptism from the questions posed by the historic Anabaptist churches and those from an Evangelical tradition about the apparent abuses of indiscriminate infant baptism. In so many churches, this sort of thing

stopped; parents and godparents were asked to be members of churches, they were given them some baptismal preparation, and baptism came to be celebrated in the context of ecclesial life and faith.

Eucharist: At the theological level *BEM* was able to reconcile some of the major disagreements of Eucharistic theology – about the nature of Christ’s presence in the Eucharist and the nature of the Eucharist as sacrifice. It provided a common framework for Eucharistic celebrations, including what happens in the Eucharistic prayer and communion.

Ministry: this text proposed the recovery of the three-fold ministry of bishop, presbyter and deacon, making it one of the most controversial points of the book. There have been some notable instances where for the sake of visible unity, some churches have revived the office of bishop in one form or another. One striking thing about the text though, is that the discussion of ministry in the church begins not with the ordained, but with the baptised.

BEM was also received in the various bilateral dialogues. For instance, the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity undertook a careful study of the dialogues between the Roman Catholic Church and its Anglican, Lutheran, Methodist and Reformed ecumenical partners. The harvesting of the results of these dialogues culminated in the publication of a 2009 text by Walter Cardinal Kasper called *Harvesting the Fruits: Basic Aspects of Christian Faith in Ecumenical Dialogue*. It is a very interesting book, and the influence of Faith and Order, especially *BEM*, can be seen all through it.

Confessing the One Faith: Following on the heels of *BEM*, perhaps too closely for its own good, is the text *Confessing the One Faith*. Given Faith and Order’s accent on “visible unity in one faith and in one Eucharistic fellowship”, *Confessing the One Faith* deserved a great deal more attention than it has received. It seems few people know of *this* text?

It is an ecumenical explication of the faith of the Church, grounded in the Scriptures, witnessed to in the Catholic creeds, and which we seek to confess afresh together. It too is a convergence text. And there is a study guide companion volume *Towards Sharing the One Faith* that can be downloaded from the F&O Commission site.

The significance of these two texts: These two texts, *BEM* and *Confessing the One Faith*, have been described as not just convergence documents, they are ‘convergence instruments’ with a power far beyond the words on the page. Mary Tanner (a former Moderator of the F&O Commission) says they “challenge us to move beyond mere response to words to embed the agreements in re-formed lives and re-formed relations. They are documents for an inner dynamic for unity, visible unity, to aid us to receive one another”. They call the churches to be different.

But it was *BEM*, as the first of these texts, that led the way in this ecumenical method. Here

its genius was in the questions it posed to the churches. First, the churches were asked whether they could recognise in the text “the faith of the Church through the ages”. In responding, few of the churches got beyond this first question, and most of the responses show that the churches were still trapped in the comparative method – so simply ‘compared’ the text with their own position.

The second and third questions were more hard-hitting. The second asked, if you can recognise ‘the faith of the Church’ in *BEM*, what does that mean for your own life, your liturgical life, the way you order your ministry, the content of your theological formation? The challenge was that we should re-form our lives in the light of the faith we had affirmed. It was inviting the churches to allow the ecumenical convergence revealed in the Lima text to be the means by which they themselves recognised the normative, apostolic church as existing beyond their own traditions and, in response, were prepared to re-think their own beliefs and practices so as to be more in harmony with the church ecumenical. It was an invitation to do ecumenical ecclesiology.

The third went further: if you can recognise the faith of the Church in *BEM*, and if other churches can recognise the same faith, then what are the implications for your relationship with one another? How can you move to live that shared faith together? To what degree of shared life and witness ought we be committed in the light of this convergence in faith?

The question can be re-phrased to focus specifically on baptism: if we are so agreed in our common understanding of baptism, why doesn’t baptism have a greater ecumenical significance? Can ecumenical potential be found here that has been ignored by the churches? This potential – the ecumenical implications – of our common baptism was taken up in a renewed study of baptism and produced two books, *Becoming a Christian* and *Baptism Today* that specifically look at the implications of a mutual recognition of baptism.

But the framework of the whole F&O programme has been, and continues to be, shaped by ecclesiology – that is, the ongoing study on the nature and mission of the Church.

Ecclesiology: In a sense, from 1910 or 1927, ecclesiology – study of the Church – has been at the heart of the F&O agenda – sharpening an ecumenical vision of the church. You can see this in the contribution of Faith and Order to the important Assembly statements of the WCC. Each Assembly produces a statement, and these are seen as landmarks of the development of contemporary understandings of the church, its unity and its mission.

Perhaps the classic ecclesiological statement of the World Council of Churches is that of the 1961 New Delhi Third Assembly:

We believe that the unity which is both God’s will and his gift to his Church is being made visible as all in each place who are baptized into Jesus Christ and confess him as Lord and Saviour are brought by the Holy Spirit into one fully committed fellowship, holding the one

apostolic faith, preaching the one Gospel, breaking the one bread, joining in common prayer, and having a corporate life reaching out in witness and service to all and who at the same time are united with the whole Christian fellowship in all places and in all ages in such wise that ministry and members are accepted by all, and that all can act and speak together as occasion requires for the tasks to which God calls his people.

The vision of New Delhi was confirmed and developed in the ecclesiological statement of the Fifth Assembly in Nairobi in 1975:

The one Church is to be envisioned as a conciliar fellowship of local churches which are themselves truly united. In this conciliar fellowship, each local church possesses, in communion with the others, the fullness of catholicity, witnesses to the same apostolic faith, and therefore recognises the others as belonging to the same Church of Christ and guided by the same Spirit.

The statement of the 1991 Assembly of the WCC at Canberra, “The Unity of the Church as Koinonia: Gift and Calling” moves away from the images of structural unity to a more biblical, and much more flexible (if not fluid) concept of unity based on the New Testament understanding of *koinonia*, impossible to translate into a single word, but commonly translated as “fellowship” or even closer, “communion”. The concept of *koinonia* has profoundly affected (in the last 30 years) the understanding of the church and the unity of the church. Mary Tanner says “*Koinonia* draws attention away from the Church as institution and structure and makes us rethink the fundamental nature of the church as personal and relational”. In part, the Canberra Statement says:

2.1 The unity of the Church to which we are called is a *koinonia* given and expressed in the common confession of the apostolic faith; a common sacramental life entered by the one baptism and celebrated together in one eucharistic fellowship; a common life in which members and ministries are mutually recognized and reconciled; and a common mission witnessing to all people to the gospel of God's grace and serving the whole of creation. The goal of the search for full communion is realized when all the churches are able to recognize in one another the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church in its fullness. This full communion will be expressed on the local and the universal levels through conciliar forms of life and action. In such communion churches are bound in all aspects of their life together at all levels in confessing the one faith and engaging in worship and witness, deliberation and action.

3.2 The challenge at this moment in the ecumenical movement as a reconciling and renewing movement towards full visible unity is for the Seventh Assembly of the WCC to call all churches:

to recognize each other's baptism on the basis of the BEM document;
to move towards the recognition of the apostolic faith as expressed through the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed in the life and witness of one another;
on the basis of convergence in faith in baptism, eucharist and ministry to consider, wherever appropriate, forms of eucharistic hospitality; we gladly acknowledge that some who do not observe these rites share in the spiritual experience of life in Christ;
to move towards a mutual recognition of ministries;
to endeavour in word and deed to give common witness to the gospel as a whole;
to recommit themselves to work for justice, peace and the integrity of creation, linking more closely the search for sacramental communion of the Church with the struggles for justice and peace;
to help parishes and communities express in appropriate ways locally the degree of communion that already exists.

The next ecclesiological statement of the WCC was adopted in 2006 by the Ninth Assembly in Porto Alegre. Prepared by members of the Faith and Order Commission, it recapitulates the historic Faith and Order vision of the unity of the Church:

Churches in the fellowship of the WCC remain committed to one another on the way towards *full visible unity*. This commitment is a gift from our gracious Lord. Unity is both a divine gift and calling. Our churches have affirmed that the unity for which we pray, hope, and work is “a *koinonia* given and expressed in the common confession of the apostolic faith; a common sacramental life entered by the one baptism and celebrated together in one Eucharistic fellowship; a common life in which members and ministries are mutually recognized and reconciled; and a common mission witnessing to the gospel of God’s grace to all people and serving the whole of creation”. Such *koinonia* is to be expressed in each place, and through a conciliar relationship of churches in different places.

This vision of unity is grounded in one baptism; it “calls the churches to walk together, even when they are in disagreement”. The text speaks of mutual accountability in terms of prayer for one another, sharing resources, assisting one another in times of need, making decisions together, working together for justice, reconciliation and peace, holding one another accountable to the discipleship inherent in baptism, and maintaining dialogue in the face of differences, refusing to say, “I have no need of you”.

The most recent ecclesiological statement of the WCC was adopted in 2013 by the Tenth Assembly in Busan. In part, it says:

We urge one another to remain committed to the primary purpose of the fellowship of churches in the World Council of Churches:

To call one another to visible unity in one faith and in one Eucharistic fellowship, expressed in worship and common life in Christ, through witness and service to the world and to advance towards that unity in order that the world may believe.

We affirm the uniqueness of our fellowship and our conviction to pursue the visible unity of the Church together, thankful for our diversity and conscious of our need to grow in communion.

In addition to these significant statements at WCC Assemblies, the ecclesiology work of the Commission has been focused in particular studies and publications for the churches to consider and respond to – furthering the ecumenical method. The first publication arose out of multilateral dialogue – *The Nature and Purpose of the Church* in 1998. There were not many responses to it from the churches, only 40 in fact. But on the basis of these responses the F&O Commission began work on a successor, namely *Nature and Mission of the Church*, which appeared in 2005. *Nature and Mission* was a text in progress, “A Stage on the Way to a Common Statement”. It was sent to the churches for another round of responses – and the Faith and Unity Commission in Australia worked on it – in preparation for the third and final version that was produced in the time for the WCC Assembly in Busan, 2013: *THE CHURCH: towards a Common Vision*. Like *BEM* before it, it was something like a 25-year project. The intent of the text is to outline what the churches can say together about the Church, and then from such an agreement “to explore the extent to which the remaining church-dividing issues may be overcome”. It picks up Faith & Order’s previous work on ecclesiology and includes the insights of the bilateral dialogues. The areas of disagreement are scattered throughout the text in somewhat ominous grey boxes.

It is hoped that this text on the Church will have as big an impact to change the ecumenical landscape as *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* did almost 40 years ago.

Ecclesiology and Ethics: In the 1980s Faith and Order embarked on a serious dialogue with other departments in the WCC which were concerned with questions of church and ethics, and issues of Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation. In part, this was in response to a concern that the once integrated vision which included both Faith and Order and Life and Work/justice and peace issues had been lost.

This work has been driven by the new church-dividing issues around human sexuality. But because moral discernment is so much broader than that, F&O made the decision to look at ethical issues around economics, science and religion and proselytism, along with sexuality. In doing so, the Commission used a case study methodology – analysing instances of moral

decision-making that are or have been church-dividing. They have included: World Alliance of Reformed Churches and Globalization, the Anglican Communion and homosexuality, the debate in Germany between the EKD (Evangelical Church of Germany) and the Episcopal Conference of Catholic Bishops over stem cell research, and the North American disagreement on proselytism in countries of the former Soviet Union. The purpose of using case studies was to give examples of how particular communities of Christians engage in moral discernment about a particular moral question. They are not position papers, but descriptions of the processes churches have used. The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of our common commitments and core values as followers of Christ even when we hold principled disagreements on moral issues.

There has been other F&O work on Authority in the church, and hermeneutics (*A Treasure in Earthen Vessels*, 1999), and such practical issues as the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity and a common date for Easter.

The theme of **Reception** too is seen as an increasingly important aspect of F&O work. The challenge is how the results of the churches' conversations get communicated and received by the churches. Or, to put it more bluntly, what happens to the published texts once they hit the bookstores, and the desks of ecumenical officers and heads of churches? Without serious attention to the question of the reception of ecumenical texts by the churches, theological ecumenism as it is carried out by Faith and Order Commissions at the international and national levels, and the numerous bilateral dialogues, simply has no future. Without the reception of ecumenical texts, the Ecumenical Movement will have become primarily a movement of good relations and cooperation, and not the transforming vision inspired by Edinburgh 1910 – of Christian unity faithful to the prayer of Jesus that “they may be one”.

Nevertheless, across all the decades since 1910 there have been countless people who caught the vision of Faith and Order, and for the sake of mission, entered into new relationships with one another, whether it be in the family of united and uniting churches, national or regional councils of churches, local ecumenical initiatives, international ecumenical instruments such as the WCC, a covenant between two churches, or individual Christians who discovered the mystery of Christ in one another.

It all began in a missionary conference in Scotland one hundred years ago which saw Christian disunity as betraying the very nature and mission of the Church, and an even smaller group of Christians who gathered to celebrate the Eucharist that week and were determined to resolve the questions of faith and order that kept them apart.

To quote Günther Gassmann one last time: “If the history of the churches in the 20th century is indeed marked by the ecumenical movement and its implications, then Faith and Order... represents a significant factor in 20th century church history”. But, while Faith and Order may take some credit for the drastically altered ecumenical landscape of the 20th century, the

churches remain divided from one another, still on issues of Faith and Order, but also on issues of biblical and theological interpretation (hermeneutics), history, culture, ethics and even obstinate division.

So, the F&O Commission has again picked up the work. Meeting for the first time after the Tenth WCC Assembly, in Romania (17-24 June 2015), the newly reconstituted Commission began to define its principal directions for ecumenical study and common activity from 2015 until the next WCC Assembly in 2022.

It determined to focus its work in the areas of examining theological foundations of the WCC programme emphasis “the pilgrimage of justice and peace”, continuing work on dialogue and the discovery of common ground among churches regarding the Christian doctrine of the Church, and coordinate consultations and seminars on how churches engage in processes of “moral discernment” when deciding policies leading to action on such topics as climate change, slavery, apartheid, human sexuality and matters of life and death.

The commission is also encouraging such long-term activities as collaboration with the Pontifical Council for Christian Unity of the Roman Catholic Church facilitating, for example, the annual preparation of resources for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity and joining other offices in the WCC and partner agencies in activities related to inter-religious dialogue and cooperation. It works, too, with the Ecumenical Disabilities Network and the Ecumenical Network of Indigenous Peoples.

The commission’s moderator, the British theologian, the Revd Dr Susan Durber, of the United Reformed Church in the United Kingdom, in the closing session of their meeting, told the commissioners that “I feel that a new wind is blowing”. And she reminded them, “The Church is God’s creation, not ours”, arguing that anxiety for religious institutions is wasted: “Overcoming poverty – this is where the real crisis is!” Referring to the economic and cultural globalization of the early 21st century, she posed the question: “What does Christian unity bring to a world that tries to impose another kind of unity?”

So, the work of Faith and Order goes on.

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