

# MINISTRY AND THE WORLD COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

## INTRODUCTION TO A SEMINAR

### I. Nature of Ministry

#### A. Various definitions

Most are historically rationalized but many theories are unconvincing on these grounds.

#### B. Functional approach

"Form follows Function": Frank Lloyd Wright. Newman also seems to approach this in his interpretation of the development of doctrine: Christianity comes into the world as an idea and then takes on forms appropriate to it.

Advantages of functional definition:

Allows continuity: Wright calls himself "Gothic" architect

Allows flexibility: functions remain constant, therefore forms not only can change but must.

#### C. Dynamic models

Cybernetics: feed-back systems: correction (learning) through experience. Open versus closed systems.

Synectics: controlled irrationality to foster innovation

Physics: power fields versus "matter" and mechanical structure

#### D. Church as "Body"

Organic model: church as a "living system." Church to be defined not so much by what it *is* as by what it *does*

Ministry as function: parts of the "Body"—the System—defined according to their mutually dependent functions (St. Paul).

### II. Nature of Ecumenical Movement

#### A. Historical origins: 19th-20th century

Mission: student and revival movements = International

Missionary Council

Unity: church unity movement = Faith and Order

Service: social and political action = Life and Work

- B. World Council of Churches (1948) culmination of this movement

- C. Functional interpretation

Movement functioned in areas and ways the separated churches could not or would not.

After Amsterdam 1948 the churches commit themselves in the WCC to work together: "We intend to stay together."

But why? for what? now?

Functional crisis: what *is* the WCC ecclesologically?

Toronto Statement what is it for? New Delhi and Uppsala Assemblies

Has the WCC lost its original functional *raison d'être*? It has bound the churches together but to what end? Or has the ecumenical movement which it symbolically represented out-run it? (Vatican II)

III. Nature of World Council of Churches

- A. Symbolical

Still has use as symbol of Christian unity. However, its limited membership in terms of the wider ecumenical movement makes it an increasingly anachronistic symbol: Roman Catholic and Conservative Evangelical ecumenism only partially involved.

- B. Functional

Relation of movement and institution perplexes all churches and ecclesiastical bodies: which is prior? Most agree that movement and institution ought to be consonant with one another, though manifestation of the "same Spirit" (St. Paul) may be different. At the same time, movement and institution ought not to be identical: leads to either triumphalism or utopianism, or to anarchism. WCC the institutional embodiment of a particular segment of the total ecumenical movement. Should it not now embody the more catholic character of the ecumenical

movement? Vatican II appears to make the WCC's function in this regard anachronistic and thus dysfunctional. Furthermore, the traditional pioneering function of the ecumenical movement is no longer adequately expressed by the WCC because of the rise of new underground, extra-ordinary Christian movements within and outside the formal ecclesiastical and ecumenical structures, as well as the growth of "confessional" ecumenical bodies.

C. Prophetic

Does the WCC have a future? Probably not in its present form. But functionally considered, its traditional purposes may still be relevant. Its semi-autonomous character gives the possibility of challenging the churches: both their anti-ecumenical isolation as well as their pro-ecumenical complacency. It may also be a safe-guard against a monolithic ecclesiastical ecumenism. The problem now is to find a new form institutionally to allow it to function in accordance with its prophetic tradition. In intent, the WCC always sought to represent the widest dimensions of the ecumenical movement. Now it must reform itself in order to realize its own fundamental *raison d'être*. This is a task for the whole Christian church.

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