

CHURCH/ECUMENISM

Topic: "A New Phase of the Ecumenical Movement"
Convener: Susan Wood, Marquette University
Presenter: Catherine Clifford, St. Paul University, Ottawa
Respondent: Bradford Hinze, Fordham University

Catherine Clifford's presentation focused on an address of Cardinal Walter Kasper to the plenary assembly of the Vatican's Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, November 2006, amplifying it with reference to the work of the Groupe des Dombes, Michael Kinnamon, Bernard Sesboüe, and others. In his address, Kasper identified five important changes or shifts characterizing the present state of the ecumenical movement. While they involve new challenges to be overcome, they also emerge within the context of considerable progress in agreement, and therefore those who speak "indiscriminately of regression, of standstill or even of an ecumenical 'ice age' and the like betray a profound ignorance of the situation."

The first shift is a concern to reaffirm confessional identity, evident in recent Vatican documents (*Communio in notio*, *Dominus Iesus*, and the 2007 "Responses to Some Questions Regarding Certain Aspects of the Doctrine on the Church") as well as in other Christian churches, to the extent that in 2006 the World Council of Churches at Porto Alegre had to remind the churches of the theological basis of the ecumenical movement. This attachment to ecclesial identity can lead to complacency with the status quo, both resignation and a refusal to grow.

A second challenge is a new lack of consensus on the basis and goal of ecumenism, including a lack of a common confession of faith. New questions relating to human sexuality, the interpretation of Scripture, cultural diversity, the development of doctrine, and ecclesial decision-making also complicate the search for ecclesial unity. A "third wave" of Christianity, represented by the rapid expansion of evangelical and Pentecostal movements, presents a third challenge. The increasing fragmentation of the ecumenical movement, with new groups that have ambiguous attitudes towards visible unity constitutes a fourth challenge. A fifth challenge is what Kasper called "secular ecumenism," for example Konrad Raiser's stressing joint witness for justice and peace over doctrinal unity. Kasper calls for a new "fundamental ecumenism," one more capable of speaking to younger generations who are less interested in old controversies. In conclusion Clifford noted how much the ecumenical landscape has changed, noting Jean-Marie Tillard's observation that without a common understanding of the faith, both ecumenism and Christianity itself could be in danger.

Bradford Hinze's response raised four points. First, he referred to ecumenism as a "saturated phenomenon" that is both gift and collective human endeavor. Second, the growing concern about confessional identity suggests a return to the comparative method of ecumenism, something commended by theologians as diverse as Avery Dulles and Roger Haight. If this concern is alarming, given the

progress of recent years, it might also lead to a deeper inquiry that involves a hermeneutic of witness, testimony, and confession, a point also made strongly in the discussion. Hinze's third point was to reemphasize the importance of the ecumenical gift exchange (Margaret O'Gara), though it will entail both purification and the realignment of ecclesial identities. Finally, he affirmed again the importance of ecumenism in the life of the local church.

THOMAS P. RAUSCH
Loyola Marymount University
Los Angeles, California