

ECUMENISM

THE NEW ECUMENICAL DIRECTORY: THE ROLE OF THEOLOGIAN IN PROMOTING CHRISTIAN UNITY

Presenters: Joan McGuire, St. Catharine, Kentucky
Jude D. Weisenbeck, Archdiocese of Louisville

There are numerous ways in which theologians exercise a role in promoting Christian unity. Two are singled out in this presentation, namely, the development of theological issues and the reception of the ecumenical movement and its work.

In the new ecumenical directory, the complete title of which is *Directory for the Application of Principals and Norms on Ecumenism*, the central theological issue, according to Jude Weisenbeck, is the Church as communion. The directory deals with this issue in a much more restricted way than is sometimes done by other participants in the ecumenical movement. Here the focus of attention is upon the communion which is realized when local churches, each under the leadership of its bishop, maintain communion with the bishops of other local churches, thus forming a college of bishops which has as its head the Bishop of Rome as successor of St. Peter.

The communion of bishops of local churches in communion with each other and with the Bishop of Rome is described as an essential condition for the fullness of *koinonia*/communion.

However, the "Decree on Ecumenism" has distinguished between full and imperfect communion. Since baptism incorporates us into the Body of Christ, all those who have been baptized are already in communion with each other even though the churches or ecclesial communities to which they belong lack some of the gifts required for full communion. Members of these churches and ecclesial communities are said to enjoy imperfect communion. The fullness of communion implies not only profession of the same apostolic faith, the celebration of the same sacraments, and ministry through ordination in the historic episcopate, but also full communion with the Bishop of Rome.

Weisenbeck notes that *koinonia*/communion is also the central theological issue in the wider ecumenical movement. This is attested to in the title of the working document prepared for the Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order held in Santiago de Compostela, Spain, in August of 1993, "Towards *Koinonia*/Communion in Faith, Life and Witness." Although the approach taken in this

document is not in opposition to that set forth in the new ecumenical directory, it is considerably different and deals with the concept of communion in the broadest possible way. It focuses upon the unity of the Church (and of all humankind) as the goal of the ecumenical movement whereas recent Roman Catholic documents focus quite specifically upon the requirements for the unity of the Church, these being the full communion of local bishops with each other and with the Bishop of Rome.

In this understanding of the requirements for the full unity of the Church, another key issue is implied, that of apostolic succession in ministry through ordination in the historic episcopate. Although the new ecumenical directory does not deal with apostolic succession as such, it does make frequent reference to an earlier document from the Pontifical Council on the Doctrine of the Faith ("Certain Aspects of the Church Understood as Communion") which leaves little doubt that it considers the ecclesial communities of the Reformation to have lost apostolic succession in orders and, therefore, to have lost the valid celebration of the Eucharist.

Not all Catholic theologians are happy with the traditional "pipeline" theory of apostolic succession in ministry, viewing this as far too mechanistic an approach to a sacred mystery. There must be a widening of perspectives on this matter. If this could be achieved, the entire question of the next steps to be taken toward entering into full communion with at least some of the Protestant churches would be located within a significantly new context. However, the new directory provides little hope that such a new breakthrough is immanent.

In her part of the presentation, Joan McGuire directs attention to the question of reception. She asserts that the revised directory provides a gauge for measuring the reception of the ecumenical movement. A distinction is made between receiving the ecumenical movement generally and integrating a particular ecumenical document into the life of the Church.

Because the 1993 ecumenical directory differs so little in substance from the 1967/70 directory, McGuire infers that the ecumenical vision of Vatican II has not been adequately received by the whole Church. A concrete illustration is that after thirty years the very basic question of the mutual recognition of ministers who preside at the Eucharist has still not been resolved. A consequence of this is little progress in the area of sacramental sharing. Also, the need for the directory to be even more specific and emphatic in the area of spiritual ecumenism and ecumenical formation is an indication that these areas have been received in a less than satisfactory way. A very specific instance of the nonreception of the ecumenical movement has been the limited ecumenical formation in seminaries, universities, and religious formation programs. McGuire challenges theologians to be more active in this area.

In a more positive vein, however, the first chapter of the new directory firmly restates the vision of Vatican II. Also numerous references from canon law in the directory suggest that the code has responded to the ecumenical challenge.

Again, on the positive side is the reception of dialogue, one of the methodologies of the ecumenical movement. Dialogue is described in considerable detail in nine articles of the revised directory. The second methodology of the movement, reception, has far less evidence in the directory of its development within the ecumenical movement. The practice of reception by the Church of the *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* document and the *Final Report* of ARCIC are examples of reception, both generally and technically, which need serious study. In the minds of some theologians, the processes used to assess these documents were defective in several ways. For these and other reasons, the insights of these documents have not been incorporated into the life of the church in a renewing and reconciling way.

McGuire suggests several ways in which theologians can contribute to the reception of the ecumenical movement. First of all, they could serve on ecumenical commissions, committees, and councils and as ecumenical officers in dioceses. They can also specialize in the study of particular denominations. They can intentionally implement the articles of the new directory dealing with ecumenical formation and the articles which deal with ecumenical cooperation, dialogue, and common witness. Unless theologians take up this challenge it is unlikely that the faithful will be well informed ecumenically to provide leadership for achieving Christian unity. In addition, there is much theological work still needed in the area of communion in the life and spiritual activity among the baptized. It is the responsibility of theologians to investigate how the theology of baptism and of the sacraments generally can lead to less restrictive practices when it comes to sacramental sharing and the mutual recognition of ministers.

The reception of the new ecumenical directory by theologians, both Catholic and otherwise, has been mixed. Some see considerable cause for rejoicing in its positive tone, its call for all to be involved in the ecumenical movement, its emphasis on spiritual ecumenism and the hierarchy of truths. On the other hand, one found the document's statement that ecumenism has "inscribed itself deeply and indelibly in the consciousness of the church" (21) too idealistic and unrealistic. Another stated that the document would be strengthened by placing primary emphasis upon the grace that is given through word and sacrament and less emphasis upon the church's hierarchical organization.

The continued attention of theologians to these and other points are urgently needed for the full reception of both the revised ecumenical directory and the ecumenical movement.

JOAN MCGUIRE, O.P.
Dominican Sisters
St. Catharine, Kentucky
