

THE UNITY OF THE CHURCHES

Topic: Catholic Theological Contribution to Faith and Order
Convener: Jeffrey Gros, US Conference of Catholic Bishops
Presenters: Ann K. Riggs, Faith and Order Commission, US;
John Ford, Catholic University

The Catholic Church is a member of the dialogues in *Faith and Order* (F&O) of both the World and the US National Councils of Churches (WCC, NCC), with the goal of visible unity of the Church, since 1969. A Conference on F&O in North America, possibly in 2005, has been proposed. In this session three elements were explored: 1) the history of F&O, 2) Catholic contributions to the international discussions, and 3) the role of US F&O.

Catholic scholars followed the theological developments that led up to the founding of the WCC (1948), with particular interest in the F&O movement (1927). During the conciliar era (1962–1965) Catholic theologians were represented at the Fourth World Conference on F&O (1963), which produced *Scripture, Tradition and the traditions*, and staged the historic dialogue on unity in the New Testament between Raymond E. Brown and Ernst Kaseman. The Commission has gone on, with full Catholic participation, to publish a number of ecumenical texts: *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (1982), *Confessing One Faith* (1991), and *The Nature and Purpose of the Church* (1998), among them.

Since the 1957 participation of John Sheerin and Gustave Weigel in the North American Conference on F&O, Catholic scholars have made significant contributions. Three were noted: (1) those to specific studies; (2) the broader, pervasive influences; and (3) the future possibilities.

By the time Catholics were formally present in 1963, the work of Couturier in the 1930s and Yves Congar through the 1940s and 1950s had laid the ground work for the theological shifts of the Council and ecumenical engagement. Already at Lund (1952) papers by Congar on *Intercommunion* and Conrad Pepler on *Mary in the Ways of Worship* were included. At Montreal, George Tavard's work on Tradition had significant influence in the text that emerged. Through the 1970s and 1980s other studies, in addition to those enumerated above: the Church and the World, The Unity of the Church and the Renewal of Human Community, included important Catholic insights on ecclesiology, sacramentality and social ethics. Theologians like Joseph Ratzinger, Pierre Duprey, Walter Burghardt, Jorge Medina Estevez, Avery Dulles, Paul Werner-Scheele, Walter Kasper, Emmanuel Lanne, and especially the late Jean-Marie Tillard, were integral to the drafting and planning of the theological work.

BEM was the first ecumenical document, since the Council, to which the Catholic Church provided a formal response (1987). The work on Chalcedon, part of the study *Toward the Common Expression of the Apostolic Faith Today*, built both on the WCC and the Catholic research with the Oriental Orthodox

churches. The influence of the ecclesiology of *Gaudium et Spes* and the linking of the Church both as mystery (sacrament) and as prophetic sign (kingdom), enabled F&O to move beyond some of its polarizations on the nature of the Church, and appropriate the option for the poor. The ecclesiological issue between East and West, or between the Reformation churches and Catholicism, have not been resolved. However, Catholic scholars have furthered the discussion. The very mass of Catholic scholarship has expanded F&Os capacity for research. Work on icons and Christology reflects contributions from Eleuterio Fortino and Christoph Schönborn. The 1993 World Conference, in that most Catholic of cities, Santiago de Compostela, focused discussions around *koinonia* ecclesiology.

The liturgical movement, Catholic analytical and systematic methodological approaches (for example, in eucharistic theology), and Catholic concerns for universal inclusiveness, have born fruit in the ecumenical movement. The 1995 encyclical *Ut Unum Sint* lifts up the importance of F&O for the Catholic Church and its theology. It also offers agenda for the theological work, including the papacy itself. In developments with the Orthodox on the one side, and with Pentecostal and Evangelical theologians on the other, the Catholic scholars bring both experience and initiatives to the WCC discussions. Certainly small communities, like the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), have been enriched by their Catholic fellow pilgrims.

In the US the F&O Commission, though more limited in scope, has contributions to make to the Catholic ecumenical project: (1) There are some churches, like the African American churches (Methodist, Baptist, and Pentecostal); the Peace churches (Mennonite, Quaker, and Brethren); or the Pentecostal and Holiness churches with which formal US Catholic dialogue occurs only in F&O. (2) Here the issue of classical reception (i.e., Ephesus, Nicea, Chalcedon), and ecumenical reception (i.e., BEM, *Confessing One Faith*) can be explored in multilateral theological discussion. (3) New church-dividing issues can be discussed here before the WCC or the Holy See are ready to entertain them (i.e., women's roles, homosexuality, racism). Finally, US Protestantism, for the most part, is not so motivated by the theological discussions of ecclesiology as might be the case with Catholics, Orthodox or Anglicans. F&O US brings these concerns into the discussion in a unique way.

The issue was raised, in this Group, whether the time might not be ripe to do a CTSA sponsored response to *The Nature and Purpose of the Church* as a Catholic contribution to the Conference on F&O in North America. The response was positive.

JEFFREY GROS

US Conference of Catholic Bishops
Washington, D.C.