

FAITH AND ORDER IN GHANA

When the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches (WCC) arrived in Accra last year to meet at the University of Ghana from July 22 till August 5, its members discovered that the country was about to follow the rest of West Africa and adopt right-hand driving. A large advertisement on the road from Accra out to the university campus carried alarming overtones: "On August 4 Go Right. Cadbury Says Good-bye." In the event, the shift from left-hand driving took place smoothly. But at the Ghana meeting the Faith and Order Commission itself seemed to say good-bye to some major features and preoccupations of its own past. These changes affected (1) the subjects dealt with, (2) the nature of the participants, and (3) the conditions affecting theological reflection. Let me take these points in turn.

SUBJECTS

Since its first conference at Lausanne in 1927, Faith and Order has worked for the unity of Christ's Church by encouraging theological exchanges on Scripture, tradition, justification, and other doctrinal topics which have divided Christians. Through nearly fifty years it has helped many separated churches to view their cherished beliefs and antipathies in a fresh and reconciling way. The Ghana meeting saw Faith and Order provisionally completing some of this classic work: on the doctrines of baptism, the Eucharist, and the ordained ministry.

After its 1971 meeting in Louvain, the Commission had published two short consensus papers, "Ecumenical Agreement on Baptism" and "The Eucharist in Ecumenical Thought." Suggestions and corrections received from the churches helped to amend these papers, which were reissued together under the title "Baptism and Eucharist in Ecumenical Perspective." In January 1974 the Geneva secretariat of Faith and Order sent Commission members a study report on "The Ordained Ministry in Ecumenical Perspective." At the University of Ghana they discussed and revised the three documents, which are to be published together in one slim volume. The aim is modest: to provide the churches with what Lukas Vischer, the director of the secretariat, called "an agreed instrument of ecumenical debate." Although both interchurch dialogues and the work of individual theologians have shown how far beliefs about baptism, the Eucharist, and the ordained ministry coincide, some members of Faith and Order shrank from using the word "consensus" too quickly. It could be mistakenly taken to imply that the Commission presumed to proclaim formally that the Christian churches, or at least those to which its members belong, were now satisfactorily united on

these doctrines. Here, as elsewhere, Faith and Order wishes to stimulate appropriate ecumenical discussion and remain faithful to its vocation of being the theological gadfly within Christ's Church.

In revising the draft statement on baptism, several members of the Commission rightly expressed unease at the first sentence: "All the churches have based their sacramental doctrine and order upon their belief that, according to the evidence of the New Testament, the sacraments which they accept were instituted by Christ."¹ Does this imply that "the evidence of the New Testament" proves *historically* that Christ "instituted" anything up to seven sacraments? Or that Christian belief about the sacraments rests (wholly?) upon the correct assessment of historical evidence? The second sentence skirts these awkward implications: "The churches hold that baptism and the Lord's Supper occupied a central position in the Church's common life from the beginning, and that they take their origin from what was said and done by Jesus during his life on earth." Much of the discussion centred on one specific problem of faith and history. Baptists find it exceedingly difficult to recognize the baptism practiced by the apostolic Church in the infant baptism accepted by most churches today. One older member of the Commission remarked to me that in general the Ghana meeting no longer showed "the joy of discovery nor the agonizing attempts for agreement" which he had experienced at previous Faith and Order meetings. Certainly the debate on baptism revealed no such joy or agony, but only continuing bewilderment about ways to reconcile believer baptist and pedobaptist churches. The Ghana statement could do little more than recommend to the former churches to "give fresh consideration to the values of responsible infant baptism," and to the latter churches to "overcome the abuse of indiscriminate infant baptism and exercise greater care in bringing infants to mature commitment to Christ."

The document on the Eucharist exudes a sense of cheerful gratitude for the fact that in many areas of thought and practice the churches have moved into close agreement. Some passages which catch the eye endorse "Catholic" principles. Thus, one "ecumenical recommendation" urges that "the Eucharist should be celebrated not less frequently than every Sunday." Another recommendation carries a piece of "Protestant" advice for Catholics: "Recovery of the early liturgies' understanding of the whole prayer action as bringing about the reality promised by Christ

¹ As I write this report, the Ghana documents exist only in stenciled form and still have to receive some final revisions in the light of comments offered at the closing sessions of the meeting. When they are published, it should be easy to locate the passages I quote or refer to, as all the documents are relatively short.

would help them overcome their differences concerning a special moment of consecration." In speaking of baptism, Faith and Order betrays an uneasy feeling that the theological ice is thin. No matter how carefully it picks its words, the ice will not bear the weight of both the pedobaptist and the believer baptist churches. But a glow of happy thanksgiving pervades the Commission's statement on the Eucharist, as it summarizes the wide and growing agreement to be found among the Christian churches. Nevertheless, it singles out some difficult issues which need further exploration: the problem of sacrifice, the role of the president, and the Eucharistic presence.

Is there a eucharistic sacrifice, and if so does it consist only in the communicants simply sacrificing themselves, or do they do so in union with Christ's eternal sacrifice, or does the celebrant offer Christ to the Father, or does Christ offer the communicants? Can the sacrifice be described as a sacrifice for the living and the dead? . . . Can anyone preside at the Lord's Supper, or ought this to be reserved either normally or exclusively to ministers specifically ordained for the purpose? Is the eucharistic transaction a nullity which is otherwise celebrated? . . . Is Christ present merely in the whole action and in the hearts of the communicants, or is he also specifically present in the bread and wine? Do the bread and wine acquire a new character which persists after the service is over? If so, should the bread and wine be reserved? And if so, only for consumption by absent members of the Church, or also for adoration?

The statement on "The Ordained Ministry in Ecumenical Perspective" occasioned the first debate by Faith and Order on the ordination of women. The study report issued to the Commission the previous January discussed the issue. In June, members of the WCC's consultation on "Sexism in the 1970's: Discrimination against Women" expressed strong support for "their sisters in churches where ordination and the employment of women as pastors and priests is a problem."² At the end of the Ghana meeting itself four Episcopal bishops ordained eleven women to the priesthood in Philadelphia. Faith and Order could not avoid the issue. The debate showed that only some Catholics agreed with their Orthodox brothers in refusing ordination to women, but no satisfactory results were reached. The commission decided to promote a broad study on "the community of men and women in the Church." Recognizing that "the theological orientation and decision-making leadership in our churches is overwhelmingly male," Faith and Order proposed that this future study should first examine the theological and biblical words, concepts, and symbols which affect the relationship of men and women. Those engaged in this theological reflection should pay serious attention to relevant studies in anthropology, social psychology, and comparative

² In a stenciled report entitled "Women and the Church."

religion. They could then explore in an ecumenical setting the ministry and ordination of women, as well as other related topics like marriage, celibacy, and the ecumenical significance of the Virgin Mary.

So much for Faith and Order's three documents on baptism, the Eucharist, and the ordained ministry. All in all, they represent excellently the present state of consensus and diversity on these central doctrines of Christian faith. The documents exemplify once again that "patient work towards theological agreement" which has constituted the vocation of Faith and Order.³ Inevitably, it is possible to take issue with details. The statement on ministry toys with the notion of substituting the ambiguous expression "special ministry" for the clearer term "ordained ministry." It remains silent about some important questions, saying nothing, for instance, about the Church's magisterium. At the broader level these statements, as well as other documents from the Ghana meeting, raise a serious question about such joint productions: What can we expect from committee theology? Let me return to this later.

The Faith and Order movement came into existence to further the unity of the Church. At the Accra meeting, speaker after speaker reminded us both of this original intention and of the progress so far achieved. In the report from the secretariat, Lukas Vischer pointed to the encouraging fact that "the ecumenical movement has come to be accepted by the churches as a normal feature of their life." Karl Lehmann, the *Wunderkind* of German Catholic theology, stressed the extent of the doctrinal agreements which have been discovered and reached by separated churches: "The number of barriers which really divide churches has become drastically smaller."⁴

But how much progress has really been made? V. C. Samuel, an Indian of the Orthodox Syrian Church of the East who teaches theology in Addis Ababa, emphasized the limitations which still persist in the area of Church union. He reminded the Ghana meeting in his paper ("How the Unity of the Church Can Be Achieved"): "All the concrete unions that have been achieved and even union plans for the future" involve "only churches of the Reformation. Neither the Roman Catholic Church nor any of the Orthodox churches of the East" have "participated in any of them." For John Deschner, a United Methodist theologian from Dallas, the ecumenical scene appears overshadowed by the WCC's preoccupation with "human liberation," and "flanked—on the right—by a conservative evangelical call for a new united world evangelization, and—on the left—by a youth determined to have the gospel without

³ Lukas Vischer, the report from the Faith and Order secretariat.

⁴ In his paper "How Can the Unity of the Church Be Reached?"

ecclesiastical or ecumenical mediation. And, everywhere, the *Zeitgeist* seems more interested in diversity than in unity."⁵

In his report, Dr. Vischer admitted that, "however normal ecumenical relationships have become and however impressive the cooperation in many fields remains, there is clearly something in the nature of a spiritual emigration from the ecumenical movement. Church unity is not in fashion." Nevertheless, we cannot allow the quest for unity to wax or wane according to the contemporary current of opinion. In fact, at a time when disintegration threatens the human community in general, the cause of Church unity calls for a special degree of sacrifice. Vischer asked: "In the present world situation, could not the unity of the Church represent in a very special sense a sign of hope?"

But did the Faith and Order Commission produce in Ghana fresh ways and powerful means for promoting genuine Christian fellowship? Mere abstract theological reflection satisfied no one. Many endorsed Lehmann's regretful observation that consensus documents, the results of much hard work, often "disappear into drawers."⁶ Revolutionary ecumenism is not enough. Through its secretariat the Commission continues to encourage bilateral conversations that are taking place between many churches around the world. A second edition of a survey on these conversations is being prepared.⁷ The secretariat has helped to arrange a conference for late 1974 at which representatives from the various churches engaged in such conversations can jointly evaluate the results already achieved. The secretariat has also been asked to organize a conference of united churches, to take place in Toronto in 1975. This conference aims to encourage these churches both to reflect on their experiences of union and to examine the new kind of fellowship they have found.

Vischer's report pointed to the "regional" nature of several movements towards Christian unity in which Faith and Order has been involved. In March 1973 the conversation between the Lutheran and Reformed Churches in Europe finally formulated the Leuenberg Concordia. This expressed a common understanding of the gospel, and stated that the mutual condemnations uttered in the past no longer apply to the two partners today. The Third Assembly of the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC), which met in Lusaka in May 1974, emphasized the independence of the African continent and called for greater unity among African churches of all kinds. Such developments prompted Vischer to ask: "Have we hitherto been seeking unity too exclusively at either the

⁵ In his paper "The Unity of the Church and the Unity of Mankind."

⁶ In his paper on the unity of the Church.

⁷ Nils Ehrenström and Günther Gassmann, *Confessions in Dialogue* (Faith and Order Paper No. 63; Geneva, 1972).

universal level or the national or local levels? Do we have to envisage the future Church as a fellowship of regional communions? Do we, therefore, need to ask much more seriously what form of unity is required in each continent?"

This principle of *cuius regio eius communio*—or, if you like, *cuius continens eius communio*—calls for serious attention. Within the Catholic Church it could encourage those who wish to see patriarchates extended through the modern world. Would the institution of patriarchates for the Indian subcontinent, Africa, and South America serve both to express and to further communion among Catholics in those areas? In symbolizing the principle of *cuius regio eius communio*, would such patriarchates help to promote unity between all Christians?

The Ghana meeting produced one document directly related to Church unity, "The Unity of the Church—the Goal and the Way." This statement developed the theme of "conciliarity," which had been invoked by the Fourth Assembly of the WCC at Uppsala in 1968 and taken up by the 1971 meeting of Faith and Order in Louvain. The document recognizes the difficulties which its favored term faces.

The multiplicity of references makes the word "conciliar" both useful and dangerous. It can evoke a response from many different quarters, but it can also create misunderstanding. Some have taken it to be an easy alternative to the quest for organic union—although . . . it in fact requires organic union. To some it may seem a remote idea which has little bearing on present realities.

Nevertheless, the Ghana meeting endorsed the concept of conciliarity as "a way of describing one aspect of a truly organic union at every level from the local to the universal." It denotes that "kind of church life" in which "a total mutual acceptance is combined with a deep respect for the 'otherness' of those who share the same fellowship but fulfil its obligations in different ways."

This document, however, leaves unresolved at least one difficulty with its key term. The word "conciliar" could often be replaced by "Christian," or sometimes even be struck out, without loss or change of meaning. Thus, a long section on "what conciliar fellowship requires and excludes" largely amounts to a description of what Christian fellowship entails. Nevertheless, "conciliarity" may very well focus ecumenical attention and evoke ecclesiastical action with special power. We have seen this happen with such terms as "community" and "collegiality." Even the slightly mystifying quality of "conciliarity" could be an advantage.⁸ I wish the word well as an instrument in the work of uniting Christ's Church.

⁸ The document itself admits that "we have not been able to give sufficient theological clarity" to "conciliarity."

Related to the document on Church unity was a statement on the "Unity of the Church—Unity of Mankind." A study project on that topic had lasted for seven years. The Ghana meeting drew it together into a brief statement to be submitted to the WCC for its Fifth Assembly in 1975. Three words recur repeatedly in this statement and gather together much of its message: oppression, conflict, and liberation. The oppressed of this world are called to engage in conflict for the sake of final liberation. "We believe," the document declares, "that the unity of mankind for which we pray and hope, and the just interdependence of free people inseparable from it, cannot be thought of apart from God's liberation and an active human response and participation in God's liberating activity." Hence "conflict" is not simply "an unpleasantness to be avoided" or "a disorder to be suppressed," but "a necessary implication of liberation." In the debate on this document, Paul Minear rightly warned: "Ideas of liberation can be demonic. The more we are committed to liberation, the more self-critical we should be." The problematic relationship between God's promise and man's engagement in liberating conflict emerged more strongly when Faith and Order dealt with the main subject of its Ghana meeting, "Giving Account of the Hope That Is within Us."

After working for nearly fifty years on particular doctrines, Faith and Order decided to initiate something broader: a common search for contemporary statements of the gospel as a whole. After its 1971 meeting in Louvain, the Commission invited Christians in many countries and churches to express together the faith and hope they have been given in Jesus Christ. Both official and informal groups gathered around the world. Statements flooded in, from the Philippines to East Germany and from Togo to New Zealand. Much of that study raised this question: How closely can the eschatological hope of Christians be identified with movements for liberation and development in this world? This question received startlingly different answers in a thick volume of papers which participants received before the Ghana meeting. An impassioned cry for socialism from the Methodist Evangelical Church in Bolivia sharply contrasted with the statement which followed from the German Democratic Republic. Faced with a hostile and atheist environment, this Christian group from East Germany believed that their "community could bear clear witness" best by "refusing to take the prosperity of the Western world as its standard, and by patterning itself instead on the poverty of Jesus." Their faith encouraged them to accept an isolated, powerless, and disadvantaged place in a socialist society. The Bolivian Methodist manifesto, however, boldly presented a message of freedom to the nation:

We make a call to all Christian Churches, to civic groups, to university students, to workers, and to all men of good will, to work together in this task of *concientizacion* and liberation of our people. . . . It is our opportunity to go down in history as the generation which assumed the responsibility . . . of getting Bolivia out of its stagnation, [and] sharing with sister nations of America the fight for liberation and hope.⁹

At the Ghana meeting itself, African church leaders like Canon Burgess Carr (the Liberian general secretary of the AACC) stressed the significance of the gospel for this-worldly hopes. On the one hand, these African Christians do not wish to repeat the disastrous error of so many Western believers, who have identified their faith with nationalism and even killed their fellow men in the name of the good news brought by Jesus Christ. Reading "the signs of the times" led the "German Christians" to acknowledge God's saving power in Hitler's rise to power. On the other hand, African Christians clearly see how human greed continues to oppress their brothers and sisters. Bola Ige, the Nigerian chairman of the WCC Programme to Combat Racism, described the present situation:

Political independence from colonial masters has not meant true freedom in many of our countries. In some places, we have only changed white slave drivers for black ones, who are driving us and sometimes whipping us more brutally. We have seen the collapse of parliamentary institutions, and in their place have risen military governments who do not depend on the will of the people to rule, but who have seized power through the barrel of the gun. We have seen corruption in high places and most vulgar abuses of office. We are seeing the riches of our land extracted by foreign combines, aided and abetted by our grinning, cigar-chewing or swaggering leaders, whose coded bank accounts in Switzerland are a manifestation of the new love between our former masters and our new native lords.

Mr. Ige could only conclude: "Whether I like it nor not, the account of the hope that is in me cannot but be in political terms. . . . Justice has no meaning, as far as I am concerned, unless it is that which is justly due to my brothers and sisters engaged in freedom struggles, or in overthrowing corrupt and decadent regimes."¹⁰

At the end of its Ghana meeting, Faith and Order adopted a document on hope, which was addressed in the first instance to the Commission itself, then to the coming Fifth Assembly of the WCC, and finally to all Christians who wish to proclaim their hope to the world. Jürgen Moltmann played a decisive role in drafting the sections describing the

⁹ In the "Document for Discussion at the Meeting of the Faith and Order Commission," pp. 156, 168, 172.

¹⁰ In his address "Giving Account of the Hope That Is in Us."

hope which Christians can hold together. These sections do not yield up their meaning fast or easily. But two basic affirmations relate God's promise to human struggles for liberation. On the one hand, these movements do not coincide with the promised kingdom. On the other hand, liberation movements can be described in sacramental language as signs of that coming kingdom: "In, along with and behind the struggle for freedom, for the dignity of human life [and] for the awakening of a living hope, we hope for God's coming and we look forward to the perfect joy of his kingdom."

This document on hope includes a number of what it called "challenges," statements from individuals or small groups protesting against accepted "orthodoxy" and expressing Christian hope from within their own contexts. These challenges come from Africa, Singapore, South America, England, and West Germany. They enrich the document both by what they say and by the lively change of tone they introduce. However, I missed a cluster of challenges coming from Marxists, atheist humanists, Moslems, Jews, Buddhists, Hindus, and other contemporaries who offer world views that compete with Christian hope. But, of course, none of these groups were represented at the Ghana meeting. In their absence, one Commission member felt free to maintain in a debate not only that "we cannot say that the Holy Spirit was at work when Karl Marx wrote *Das Kapital*," but even that "we cannot say that book had anything to do with Jesus Christ." We can back away from this question like a horse from water. But is it any longer tolerable for the Faith and Order Commission, synods of bishops, or other important world conferences of Christians to meet, unless they invite representative non-Christian observers? At the very least, the presence of such observers would symbolize that "outside" world to which Christians wish to offer an account of their hope. And at best, these observers would help Christian leaders, preachers, and theologians to drop jargon, really face differing and even hostile views, and communicate in terms others can understand.

PARTICIPANTS

If non-Christian observers were missing at the Faith and Order meeting in Ghana, who were the participants? And what does the Commission's membership suggest about the ecumenical shape of things to come? The official members of this theological arm of the WCC are largely middle-aged men from the North Atlantic countries, veterans who have worked for years in the ecumenical movement. To effect some balance at the Ghana meeting, dozens of Third World Christians, women, and younger men were invited as consultants. Eleven Roman

Catholic theologians are members of the Commission. Another seven Catholics came to Accra as invited consultants. In all, 170 theologians gathered in Ghana. They came from more than fifty countries and belong to over twenty churches, from the Russian Orthodox Church to the Pentecostal Church of Chile and from the United Methodist Church to the Church of Jesus Christ in Madagascar. There were some glaring gaps. No one came from Spain, and there was not a single Roman Catholic from the British Isles.

At present, the Faith and Order Commission numbers only four women among its 116 official members, but it includes both a sprinkling of lay persons and a fairly large group from the Third World. The Commission certainly needs more women, lay Christians, and younger persons to reach a balanced membership. But even now its composition shows up the lopsided nature of an equivalent body in the Catholic Church, the Vatican's International Theological Commission. That body (as constituted for the period 1974-79) includes no layman—let alone any laywomen—among its thirty members. Europe supplies at least twenty-two of those members—a chilling example of latter-day theological imperialism. The choice of membership suggests that, as far as the Vatican is concerned, Europe is Catholic theology and Catholic theology is Europe.

Earlier meetings of Faith and Order have included Christians from the Third World. But at Accra in 1974 they made a decisive impact in this ecumenical forum. They strongly challenged both the academic methods which the Commission has hitherto followed and its preoccupation with the North Atlantic world. A South American member of Faith and Order protested against the manipulating rationalism of his European colleagues: "We make our contribution. They add a sentence or two, and it all flows on." An African priest criticized the Western domination of the quest for Christian unity: "A great number of us have tended to be echoes of our master's voice. You overwhelm us with yourselves. We would really like to be ourselves and we will say some things which will shock you." A consultant from Sri Lanka made this promise to the European theologians: "It is only when you see coming from Asia and Africa what you will call 'heresies' that I will begin to hope."

One Western theologian, a veteran of Faith and Order and the WCC since 1948, criticized the Ghana meeting in the light of the good old days: "The reports are now longer and the theology is sloppier." I wonder. Documents from Ghana like the statement on hope may be larger than many earlier products of Faith and Order, but that is at least partly due to the fact that African, Asian, and Latin American theologians have been allowed to state their case. Their modes of reflection can differ from

the classical tradition of Western intellectualism, may sound “sloppier” to the European ear, but in fact provide many Christians with the theological means of uniting theory and practice. At the end of the day, have Europeans the right to insist that Wolfhart Pannenberg is theologically “superior” to Kosuke Koyama, or Hans Küng to Gustavo Gutiérrez?

CONDITIONS AFFECTING THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

Faith and Order deliberately chose a Third World setting for its 1974 meeting. African geography, history, and worship confronted the participants and colored their approach to theological reflection. As usual, the conditions of committee theology affected the written results of the Commission’s discussions. Let me explain these two points in turn.

On the excursion day which interrupted the two weeks of work, I stood with members of the Commission in the dungeons of Cape Coast Castle, about eighty miles to the west of Accra. Bats darted over our heads, as the guide took us through those vaulted caverns. In past centuries, up to a thousand slaves were held there, before being hurried through three outlets to the beach and the waiting ships. Archeologists have unearthed beads, pipes, and human bones from the mud-encrusted floors of those “steaming, smelly dungeons,” as a contemporary Ghanaian poet called them.¹¹ In their dungeons the slaves could hear Christians praying and singing in the chapel directly above them. To the east and west of Cape Coast Castle, dozens of other castles and forts built by British, Danes, Dutch, and Portuguese recall the slave trade, which continued even after the official abolition in 1809. Ghana pushed all those monuments of inhuman greed before the eyes of the Faith and Order Commission. It was like engaging in theological reflection within sight of Auschwitz or Dachau. Geography plays its part in the theological process. The 1974 meeting would not have been the same if we had assembled at the WCC headquarters in Geneva, in a Roman seminary, or at the Interchurch Center in New York.

Words like “oppression” and “liberation” took on new overtones when one entered the dungeons of Cape Coast Castle and saw the fetish shrine, a set of stone slabs walling off the outlets through which slaves were driven to the ships that took them away forever from their homes. Some Ghanaians come there today to drop coins, leave jewelry, or pour libations of alcoholic drink on those slabs. It is their way of recalling that way of the cross on which Christians drove their ancestors.

One evening Hans-Rüdi Weber led the Faith and Order meeting in reflections on “The Cross in Many Cultures.” We saw slides of the art

¹¹ Joe De Graft, *Messages*, ed. K. Awona and G. Adali-Mortty (London, 1971) p. 31.

and heard the music through which Europeans, Latin Americans, Africans, and Asians have interpreted the Crucifixion in its agony, its love, and its victory. The discussion swept from Latin American representations of Christ as a tortured liberator, through mystic interpretations by a Javanese contemplative, to African visions of the cosmic Christ realized by Fr. Engelbert Mveng's giant figure in the Yaounde cathedral. Theology can be described as watching one's language in the presence of God. As he "watches his own language," the theologian dare not ignore Christian music, painting, and sculpture. Any theological method which ignores the language of sacred art does so at its peril. Faith and Order's evening dedicated to the Crucifixion arose from an ecumenical research project on "The Crucifixion of Jesus and Culture," which the WCC Portfolio for Biblical Studies will publish in 1975. Through that session the Commission expressed its conviction. A truly valuable Christian theology cannot be developed simply by the usual technical scholarship of theological faculties.

Various experiences of worship gave a firm liturgical tone to the Accra meeting. At the daily sessions of prayer, participants sang hymns taken from the new edition of *Cantate Domino*, an ecumenical hymnbook in both European and non-European languages to be published shortly by Bärenreiter Verlag. But it was the opportunity to share in many African services which made this Faith and Order meeting deeply committed to worship as the natural medium for theological reflection. One Sunday I went to a Presbyterian church with Emerito Nacpil (a Methodist from the Philippines) and Jürgen Moltmann (of the Reformed Evangelical Church in Germany). The congregation greeted us with affection and thundered out their hymns in the Twi language. From either side we could hear the beat of drums from two "spiritual" churches, where the members sang, clapped their hands, and danced. In our Presbyterian service, drums were used only at the offering. The style was more sedate, but warm happiness hung in the air. One "spiritual" church held an evening service for us at the University of Ghana. The drums and joyful singing encouraged Faith and Order members to join in the dancing—the first time perhaps that many of the Western theologians had ever danced during a liturgy. The dancing, drumming, and full-hearted singing of Africa gave fresh meaning to words like "celebration" and "joy."

Some church services in Ghana, however, made one wince at occasional racist overtones imported with Western Christianity. At a Methodist harvest festival, the African congregation sang the old gospel hymn "Wash me and keep me whiter than snow." During the interdenominational rally at the Catholic cathedral in Accra, Africans were

expected to join their white brethren in singing "O'er heathen lands afar/Thick darkness broodeth still." A white Christ hung on the crucifix above the main altar, and around the walls of the cathedral the same white Christ appeared in the Stations of the Cross. The Faith and Order Commission itself still has to learn fully the lessons of cultural sensitivity. The document on "The Unity of the Church—the Goal and the Way" declares: "We should . . . face together the challenges of the society we live in and confront together the social and political issues which have to be dealt with in order to *heal the blackness* of the wider human community" (italics mine).

The geography of Africa, reminders of colonial history, and African styles of worship created an atmosphere for the *process* of theological thought in which Faith and Order engaged. The written *results* of the meeting reveal once again the effect of committee theology. Many critics of the WCC and its Faith and Order Commission fear that ecumenical consensus inevitably entails compromises which betray the central beliefs of Christianity. I suspect, however, that the Commission's style of committee theology involves quite a different range of effects and problems. Like Church councils, the Commission's statements frequently quote and endorse previous documents. Faith and Order committees look back approvingly to earlier Faith and Order committees. Rather than abandon truths, at times the Commission's documents try to pack too much in. During the discussion in Ghana over the Eucharist, for instance, various participants insisted that this statement include cherished perspectives: "There is no mention of the Eucharist as creating a covenant. The document should connect the Eucharist with the Church right from the outset. Why isn't this sacrament related clearly to the other sacraments?" Yet, if everything is said, Faith and Order documents can lose their sharp profile and become less effective as instruments of ecumenical debate.

Along with the problem of overloading, Commission statements risk lapsing into dull and clumsy wordiness. Passages like the following survived two successive drafts:

The churches are faced with the question whether they are prepared to initiate a process of reception with regard to these agreements on all levels of church life with a view to definite steps towards full church fellowship. This occupation with the difficult task of overcoming the traditional divisions is still at the centre of ecumenical endeavours in Europe and North America—the continents where these divisions have their historical roots and their formative impact on many aspects of ecclesiastical and secular life.¹²

¹² In "The Unity of the Church—the Goal and the Way."

I fear that such a passage will appear in the published reports, when it could have been said more briefly and elegantly:

The churches should ask themselves whether they will welcome these agreements at every level of church life and take definite steps towards full church fellowship. The difficult task of overcoming traditional divisions still dominates ecumenical endeavors in Europe and North America—the continents where these divisions began and continue to shape many aspects of ecclesiastical and secular life.

If theology is as much an art as a science, ecumenical theology is largely a matter of effective communication. Faith and Order needs a literary ombudsman to ensure that all its documents enjoy a stylish and effective presentation.

Finally, the term “committee theology” suggests the status of Faith and Order statements. They lack any legal authority in the churches. What effect, for example, will the following recommendation from “The Unity of the Church—the Goal and the Way” have?

Regional and national assemblies too can practice mutual hospitality. At the least, observers from other churches should be invited in order that their very presence witness to the wider fellowship. Churches should further consider whether their policy-making bodies could not now regularly meet together. The Second Vatican Council has set an admirable example. As a sign of growing conciliar life, each church should inform all other churches with which it has active contact of major internal decisions it is taking, and—even better—ask their counsel before taking any final action.

Many church leaders show themselves very reluctant to receive and even recognize the results of ecumenical meetings that have not been conducted under their immediate control and auspices. Even when such leaders show the best will in the world, a gap remains between the Faith and Order Commission and most Christians. At the Lusaka meeting of the AACC, Jean Kotto, a Presbyterian from Cameroun, remarked: “We do not want to encourage theology for the sake of theology. We not only have to feed giraffes; we also have to feed the smaller animals of the forest.” In short, how can theological agreements hammered out by Faith and Order committees reach the great mass of Christians to change their attitudes?

It is possible to feast on the carrion comfort of abusing church authorities for failing to help effectively such work of ecumenical communication. But only the concerted efforts from many Christians can ensure that Faith and Order and other international ecumenical bodies do more than provide theological giraffes with their food. All Christ’s people must be fed and united. We have to answer for ourselves the

question "What am I really doing to promote Christian unity?"

To conclude. The Faith and Order meeting took as its main task "Giving Account of the Hope That Is within Us." This choice largely coincides with the themes of several other major Christian conferences in mid or late 1974: the International Congress on World Evangelization held at Lausanne (16-25 July), the World Synod of Bishops which discussed "Evangelization of the Modern World," and the World Methodist Council which gathered in Jerusalem in late November to prepare the 1975 world drive for evangelism within the Methodist churches. These topics reveal a significant convergence of concern: How should we present the good news of Christ to the contemporary world?

Beyond question, Billy Graham's opening address in Lausanne showed hints of a new rapprochement between conservative evangelicals and WCC ecumenists. He spoke of "the World Church," did not shrink from the language of liberation,¹³ recognized the need to avoid falsely identifying the gospel with specific cultures and political programs ("This has been my danger"), and attacked the "error" of denying "that we have any social responsibility as Christians. It is true that this is not our priority mission. However, it is equally true that Scripture calls us time and again to do all in our power to alleviate human suffering and to correct injustice." Dr. Graham invited the Fifth Assembly of the WCC to adopt "more evangelical concepts of evangelism and mission." "The time has come," he concluded, "for evangelicals to move forward, to encourage, challenge and bring hope to the World Church."

Ultimately, there should be no need to choose between being ecumenical and being evangelical, as there has to be a choice between left-hand and right-hand driving. The ecumenists in Accra did not see themselves as an alternative to the evangelicals in Lausanne, the very birthplace of the Faith and Order movement in 1927. Last year's meeting of the Commission found no conflict between seeking the unity for which Christ prayed and "giving account of the hope" we have received through Christ.

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¹³ "It is right that we look for answers and solutions, but we must look in the right place, and that place is the Lord Jesus Christ who can bring spiritual renewal *and liberation*" (italics mine).