

The Ecumenical Movement

Causes

Deepest: Will and Prayer of Jesus that “they may be one” (John 17: 11, 21)

Realization that Division is Sin

Realization of Scandal of Division and Obstacle to Evangelization of the World (John 17: 21, 23)

Phases

1. Protestant and Orthodox Beginnings (1910 – 1920)

Edinburgh Missionary Conference (1910) – all Protestant with many Anglicans
Encyclical Letter of Orthodox Patriarch of Constantinople (1920)

2. First Structuring and Catholic Pioneers (1921 – 1948)

Life and Work Conferences (Stockholm 1925 and Oxford 1937)
Faith and Order Conferences (Lausanne 1927 and Edinburgh 1937)
Malines Conversations (Catholic-Anglican 1921 – 25) hosted by Cardinal Mercier of Belgium.

Pius XI asks the Benedictines to assign a work of unity between East and West to some abbeys. One fruit was the establishment of the monastery at Amay, later at Chevetogne (Belgium), founded by the liturgical and ecumenical pioneer, Dom Lambert Beauduin, about 1926.

Negative encyclical of Pius XI: *Mortalium Animos* (1928). Beauduin is exiled from his monastery, and not allowed back until his old age in early 1950s.

Pioneer of Spiritual Ecumenism: Fr Paul Couturier (Lyon: 1881 – 1953): From Church-centred vision of the others returning to Rome to a Christ-centred vision of renewal and convergence, all becoming more like Christ.

Pioneer of Theological Ecumenism: the French Dominican Fr Yves Congar (1904 – 95): From negative view of other Churches and communities (“one true Church” and everything else false) to positive evaluation of other churches and their gifts (with theological question of how a Catholic theology of the Church can acknowledge giftings of other churches and communities).

3. W.C.C. and Slow Catholic Progress (1948 – 1961)

Foundation of W.C.C. by Protestants & Orthodox: First Assembly in Amsterdam (1948).

First official Catholic recognition that the ecumenical movement is a positive development: Catholics allowed to pray *Our Father* with other Christians (1949).

Unofficial group of Catholic ecumenists starts to meet in Europe from 1952.

Catholics forbidden to attend 2nd W.C.C. Assembly at Evanston, USA (1954).

International Missionary Council integrated into the W.C.C. in 1961.

Pope John XXIII mentions unity as a purpose of the Council he is calling (1959). He sets up Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity in the Vatican and appoints a biblical scholar, Augustin Bea, as its president (1960).

Other church leaders begin to visit Pope John, one of the first being Dr Geoffrey Fisher, the Archbishop of Canterbury, in 1960.

Catholic observers for first time at 3rd W.C.C. Assembly in New Delhi (1961).

4. Vatican Two (1962 – 1965)

Observers from other Churches invited to a Council for the first time. Some well-known and influential theologians are present (e.g. Oscar Cullmann). They are given copies of all the confidential documents. Through their comments to the SPCU and to the bishops, they exercise a real influence. For many bishops, it is the first time they have met non-Catholic leaders.

Decree on Ecumenism (*Unitatis Redintegratio*) issued in 1964. Couturier's vision of spiritual ecumenism is accepted by the Council (UR, para. 6 – 8). The Catholic Church is now committed to collaboration with other Christian churches and communities and to the search for visible unity.

Theological Support: Local church (diocese) and universal Church as communion of local churches around and under the Pope as bishop of Rome.

Pilgrim Church on the way to the coming Kingdom: always in need of renewal.

Dialogue as right way for human persons to relate.

Consequences of Council's decision:

- Start of many bilateral dialogues (with Anglicans, Lutherans, Presbyterians, Orthodox, Methodists, Disciples, Pentecostals, Mennonites)

- Catholic membership of Councils of Churches at local and national level (but not of W.C.C.)

- Full Catholic participation in Faith & Order (Doctrine) dept of W.C.C.

- Collaboration with Bible Societies and some joint translations.

5. W.C.C. partly off track? (1968 – 1998)

Uppsala Assembly (1968) marked by a more political turn in W.C.C. and greater influence of liberal theology, especially in practical programs.

Faith & Order remained more orthodox, producing an important document *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (1982).

It is from 1960s that Evangelical suspicion of W.C.C. grows (fears of Catholic entry into ecumenical movement, left-wing political sympathies, option for dialogue over evangelism, fear of syncretism).

Move away from goal of visible organic unity (different models such as "reconciled diversity")

But positive element: greater focus on **communion** as key concept

Greater influence of "young" continents

6. Weaknesses in Official Ecumenism (1970s to 1990s)

- Insufficient spiritual grounding
- Neglect of eschatology (second coming of Jesus)
- Too intellectual (unity primarily through theological agreement)
- Not inspiring to younger generation
- Lacking grass-roots support
- Not seeing ecumenical significance of charismatic movement
- Insufficient attention to some grass-roots developments

7. Recovery of spiritual ecumenism (1995 on)

Pope John Paul II's encyclical *Ut Unum Sint* (1995). New emphasis again on "spiritual ecumenism" (prayer for unity, dialogue as vertical and horizontal, as examination of conscience, confession of past sins against unity).

More openness to contribution of the charismatic movement to unity.

More recognition of the importance of Evangelicals and Pentecostals.

Role of Taizé Community and their annual youth gatherings in Europe.

Re-thinking and re-structuring in W.C.C. from 1998. Orthodox complaints heard.

New method of consensus rather than majority vote adopted for first time in 2006.