

Touchstone

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Editorial

The theme of this issue of *Touch* was chosen because of the upcoming 11th Assembly of the World Council of Churches which will take place in Karlsruhe, Germany this August and September.

The Protestant Reformation in the 1500s sparked three centuries of religious conflict and the fragmentation of Western Christendom. That tide began to turn in the 1800s with the realization that a divided church was a less effective church. The foundations were laid for the 20th century ecumenical movement, The United Church of Canada being one of its early and notable achievements. It helped to lay the groundwork for the formation of the World Council of Churches in 1948, a global association of over 350 denominations and ecclesial bodies.

But as western, mainline churches like the United Church have declined both in numbers and influence, so the ecumenical movement has receded from the forefront of the churches' consciousness.

This issue of *Touch* ~~seeks~~ ^{endeavours} to remind us of the importance of ecumenism. Our contributors explore the theological and missional reasons why Christian unity remains a matter of critical importance. Ecumenism is not only an institutional strategy but theological imperative. It is rooted in Jesus' prayer "that all may be one . . . so that the world may believe..." (John 17:21) The church is called to be the sign, witness and foretaste of the reconciliation God envisions for all of creation. A broken and bickering church is both an affront to God and a scandal to the world.

Russell Johnson situates the challenge of ecumenical dialogue within the wider dilemma of how human beings can maintain connection in the face of deep differences. Building on the philosophy of Martin Buber, Russell proposes a "mode of interaction that is both dialogical and confrontation"—that allows us to connect with one another, yet not compromise our deepest convictions or ignore our differences. This model has relevance for human disagreement and polarization in all their manifestations, but especially for Christian theology and practice.

Sister Donna Geernaert places ecumenical dialogue within a trinitarian framework. The Triune God, she writes, is in a continual dialogue with fallen and redeemed humanity. Donna uses the long-standing Roman Catholic—United Church of Canada dialogue as a case study for exploring disagreement from the standpoint of shared faith.

Gail Allan looks at the commitment made by the World Council of Churches in 2013 to undertake a "pilgrimage of justice and peace." The image of pilgrimage is both richly metaphorical and intensely practical. It

involves intentionally seeking a form of ecumenism that arises from “the lived experience of people who come together in faithful response to the cries of a hurting world.” Pilgrimage is an ecumenical strategy that brings together “storytelling from the margins” and faithful action directed towards justice and peace.

Sandra Beardsall invites us to see how “Faith and Order” is still very much relevant to the church today. The Faith and Order movement has explored matters of doctrine and ecclesial practice that are often the source of Christian division. These questions are sometimes overshadowed by the seemingly more urgent calls to address issues like the climate crisis, racism, or poverty. But, Sandra argues, they go to the heart of the church’s being and remain questions of enduring importance for Christians today.

Each issue of *T o u c h* includes a profile of an individual who has made a significant impact on the church and the world. This month, we have reached into our archives to reprint the profile of Dr. George Pidgeon, Presbyterian minister, indefatigable champion of Church Union and the first Moderator of The United Church of Canada. This profile, originally published way back in 1985, was written by Rev. Frank Fidler who made his own mark on the church as George Pidgeon’s young assistant minister at Bloor St. United Church in Toronto, and through his work at the United Church’s Board of Christian Education.

Our “From the Heart” section of *T o u c h* provides space in each issue for more personal reflections on the theme. Three individuals—former Moderator Lois Wilson, long-time ecumenical activist Jim Hodgson, and Filipino minister Noel Suministrado, now serving in The United Church of Canada—share their very personal ecumenical stories. As always, *T o u c h* is rounded out with three book reviews.

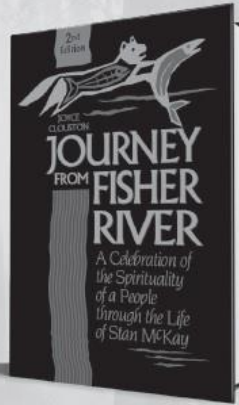
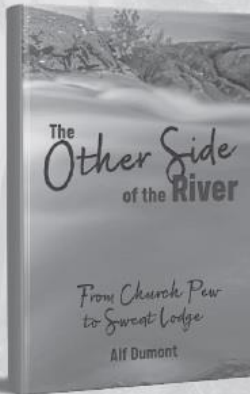
It is a joy and a privilege to edit *T o u c h*. We provide a forum for theological conversation and engagement that is becoming increasingly rare today. I wouldn’t be able to do this without the help of an excellent team who give their time to make this journal possible. I want to thank the Board of Directors for their dedication and support. Especially I want to acknowledge Rob Fennell who is completing his term as Chair but thankfully remaining on the Board; to Sandra Beardsall who is stepping into the chair; to Michelle Hogman who is stepping down as Subscription Manager, also to Rachel McRae, our copy editor, who makes sure all t’s are crossed and i’s dotted; to Jerome Kudera, who unravels the mysteries of computer formatting inaccessible to us lesser mortals; and to John Van Duzer who has stepped down as our long-time cover designer.

T o u c h is looking at providing digital as well as print access to the journal. To accomplish this will require both expertise and financial


resources. If you want to see *Touchstone* to thrive, I encourage you to renew your own subscription, to consider giving a gift subscription to a family member or friend, and to make a tax deductible donation which you can do online by going to our website www.touchstone.ca

Paul Mitchell

Indigenous History Month



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DIALOGUE, DIFFERENCE, AND DISAGREEMENT: MARTIN BUBER AND POLARIZATION

By Russell P. Johnson

Political polarization is, almost by definition, hostile to dialogue. The more people understand their cultures in “us versus them” ways—that is, the more a myriad of moral commitments seem to coalesce into a great dichotomy between two opposing groups—then the more challenging it is to have a frank and charitable conversation with another person about potentially divisive topics.

When societies become polarized, dialogue is necessary for people to understand one another and cooperate with one another for the common good. But the very circumstances that make dialogue urgently needed are the circumstances that make it difficult. It is a kind of bitter irony, like when you are searching for your glasses but you need your glasses in order to find them. Polarization deepens because it hinders the kinds of discourse that could counteract it.

As political polarization is on the rise, dialogue is in short supply. This affects not only explicitly political discourse but also ecumenical relations, especially since the fault lines that divide Christians from one another largely map onto the cultural fault lines that divide political parties from one another. If people are accustomed to seeing political disagreements in terms of two opposing sides, this habitually informs the way they navigate disagreements in other spheres. Soil in which political dialogue cannot grow is soil in which ecumenical dialogue cannot grow. At present, we are deprived of the fruits of both. Yet instead of simply encouraging people to be more open to dialogue, we should ask why we are often resistant to dialogue, and how we can go about interacting dialogically with people we believe to be dangerously wrong about moral, theological, and political issues.

Though many recognize the need for dialogue and its benefits for interreligious and democratic cooperation, many also believe dialogue is woefully inadequate to address the disagreements that divide us. We are reluctant to communicate dialogically, I argue, precisely because we see the issues at stake to be too important. To embrace dialogue, it seems, is to abandon the effort to persuade others to change their views. That is a sacrifice we are unwilling to make when it comes to the truths that we want to see endorsed by our peers and enforced in our policies. By contrast, building on the work of the Jewish philosopher of dialogue Martin Buber, we can identify a mode of interacting that is simultaneously dialogical and confrontational. Without requiring us to check our moral and theological

convictions at the door, we can express our deep disagreements with others' views without in the process deepening the chasms of polarization. In these dialogical disagreements, we can come to a fuller understanding of the truth and a fuller appreciation of the image of God in ourselves, in our interlocutors, and in the relationships that bind us.

Uncompromising Convictions

To illustrate why we are often rightly leery of calls for dialogue, let me offer two examples of beliefs I hold. First, one belief I hold is that people should be baptized only after they have chosen to be, since baptism marks a person's voluntary dedication to the Body of Christ on earth. Though I believe this and could offer some reasons for it, I have no intention of convincing others to believe likewise. The difference between infant baptism and adult baptism had immense implications in sixteenth-century Europe, but it seems to me less significant now. I would happily attend the baptism ceremony of a friend's newborn and clap at all the appropriate moments (I assume there's clapping; everything I know about infant baptisms comes from *The God We can talk*). This kind of belief "mere commitment." If I were at an ecumenical gathering, I could share a bit about baptismal practices in the Mennonite tradition, I would listen receptively as a Lutheran colleague explains her church's understanding of baptism, and we could part ways with mutual appreciation, feeling like this is more a matter of difference than of disagreement.

By contrast, I believe that capital punishment is morally, theologically, and practically indefensible. This is not a *mere commitment* I happen to hold; this is a *conviction* I hold and I think others should hold, too. I believe that people who approve of the death penalty are wrong, and wrong in a way that is important. If I were at an ecumenical gathering and someone said, "You are against the death penalty and I am for it, and we can appreciate our differences of opinion as expressions of the rich diversity of the Body of Christ," I would be very angry with him. This is not a matter of difference, but disagreement. Part of my anger would be that he has mischaracterized my conviction—it is not a fun fact about me or a quirk of my denomination, it is the truth. His own faith is deficient to the degree that he does not recognize the truth, and his actions may be harmful if he persists in clinging to his false beliefs.

If engaging in dialogue means treating our convictions as if they were mere commitments, then dialogue is a pitiable enterprise that deserves much of the derision it has received. But for Martin Buber, dialogue does not entail holding our convictions lightly, refraining from confrontation, or putting false beliefs on equal standing with true ones.

Dialogue is not a matter of conversational restraint—it is not argumentation minus something, but argumentation plus something. To see what this additional component is, let us turn to Buber’s own words:

The chief presupposition for the rise of genuine dialogue is that each should regard his partner as the very one he is. I become aware of him, aware that he is different, essentially different from myself, in the definite, unique way which is peculiar to him, and I accept whom I thus see, so that in full earnestness I can direct what I say to him as the person he is. Perhaps from time to time I must offer strict opposition to his view about the subject of our conversation. But I accept this person, the personal bearer of a conviction, in his definite being out of which his conviction has grown—even though I must try to show, bit by bit, the wrongness of this very conviction. I affirm the person I struggle with: I struggle with him as his partner, I confirm him as creature and as creation, I confirm him who is opposed to me as him who is over against me. It is true that it now depends on the other whether genuine dialogue, and mutuality in speech arise between us. But if I thus give to the other who confronts me his legitimate standing as a man with whom I am ready to enter into dialogue, then I may trust him and suppose him to be also ready to deal with me as his partner.¹

In this passage, Buber explains that the necessary element of dialogue is confirmation, which means something like recognizing the humanity of the conversation partner. Through dialogue we strive to treat the other person as they actually are, and not merely how we perceive them to be based on our stereotypes, projections, and illusions. This involves a particular kind of listening in which we recognize how the other person is like us—they have a unique voice, they have hopes and fears, they have value beyond their social function—and also how the other person is unlike us and our imagination of them—they perceive the world differently, they know things we do not know, they transcend any ideological label we could place upon them. In dialogue, we expect to be surprised by what the other person says, rather than confining them to the preconceptions we have about why their group believes what they believe.

This interpersonal regarding of the conversation partner as unique does not necessarily mean we agree with them or approve of their beliefs.

¹ Martin Buber, *The Knowledge of God* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), 79–80.

By seeing the dialogue partner as fully human like ourselves, we see them as humans capable of change, and humans who are in a profound sense at odds with themselves. If someone believes something false, then that belief within them is at odds with the vital core of their being that wants to apprehend and live in light of the truth. For Buber, dialogue involves helping another resolve this inner tension, a tension they may not be aware of. Buber writes, “I can help this man even in his struggle against himself.”² Dialogical argumentation, then, is arguing simultaneously with and against the different concerns that motivate the other person, including the basic human concern to be understood and confirmed by others.

By extending a measure of trust to the other person by allowing them to surpass our expectations, we at the same time enable them to become who they ought to become. Buber explains,

Confirming means first of all, accepting the whole potentiality of the other and making even a decisive difference in his potentiality, and of course we can be mistaken again and again in this, but it’s just a chance between human beings. I can recognize in him, know in him, more or less, the person he has been (I can say it only in this word) *c r e a t o r b e c o m e*.”³

When we communicate with someone dialogically, we are inviting them to become more like the person they were created to be, and this is true even when the invitation takes the form of a challenge or a rebuke.⁴ As James Baldwin writes, “If I love you, I have to make you conscious of the things you don’t see.”⁵ To return to my earlier example, while recognizing the full humanity of the person who approves of the death penalty, I can try to convince him otherwise—not just acting out of my own anxiety, my own tribalism-fueled desire to win, or only a concern with what will happen if he votes his conscience, but from a loving desire to make him

² Ibid., 183.

³ Ibid., 182.

⁴ Buber’s writings on dialogue tend to treat dialogue as something both parties enter into (see *The Knowledge of God*). But he acknowledges that there is speech that invites another into dialogue even if this offer is not reciprocated. Subsequent theorizing has focused as much on dialogical communication, in which one person engages with the other with openness, confirmation, directness, and an offer of mutuality, even if the other person does not respond in kind and there is no moment of dialogue that emerges between them.

⁵ *C o n v e r s a t i o n s* with Fred R. Standley and Louis H. Pratt n (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1989), 156.

conscious of the things he does not see.

Seeking the Truth in Love

A crucial component of dialogical communication is that people are speaking to one another. That may seem obvious, but when we are talking about our convictions with people who do not share them, we seldom actually speak *t* our opponents. We are more likely to speak *a b o t h e r* or to speak *a* them.⁶ This is why Buber believed for many years that public dialogue was impossible.⁷ Consider a moderated debate between political candidates—it is not a dialogue; it is scarcely even a debate. Each candidate is performing for the audience rather than actually trying to understand and convince the other people on stage. The same thing happens when people argue on social media. Though one’s comments may superficially be directed toward the person one is arguing with, one is fundamentally performing a role, usually to win the approval of one’s own ideological group.⁸ Though dialogue can occur on social media or on stage, dialogical communication is considerably more likely to occur when people can interact as individuals-in-relationship without feeling pressure to represent a group or score points in a broader cultural conflict. When two or three people are speaking directly to one another without an audience, they can be more honest about their convictions, their uncertainties, and their personal investment in the topics under consideration and the relationship between conversation partners. Dialogue thus breaks down some of the defensiveness we have; we can admit—including to ourselves—what aspects of our groups’ orthodoxies that we are hesitant about without fear of judgment.

For Buber, dialogue happens when people are open to transcending the categories that we use to define ourselves and others. A liberal talking to a conservative cannot be dialogue, but Dani (who holds mostly liberal beliefs) and Eliza (who holds mostly conservative beliefs) can have a dialogue. The barriers to dialogue have less to do with the degree of disagreement, and more to do with our tendency to make sense of the world through labels that objectify as much as they clarify. We do not need to do away with these labels entirely, but rather act out of the recognition that there is more to us than our religious identities and our

⁶ Martin Buber, *B e t w e e n* (New York: Macmillan, 1965), 6.

⁷ Kenneth N. Cissna and Rob Anderson, *M o m e n t s o f M e e t i n g : B a n d t h e P o t e n t i a* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2002), 2–4 *D i a l o g*

⁸ Chris Bail, *B r e a k i n g t h e S o c i a l M e d i a P r i s m : P o l a r* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2021).

political identities, and there is more to our interlocutors than the groups they belong to or the -isms they are defending.⁹ To return to my earlier example, to the extent that I think of my interlocutor merely as another hawkish death-penalty advocate, I am shutting myself off from the possibility of dialogue with him that could challenge the presuppositions I have about the ethics of punishment, about him, and about myself. In dialogue, I expect that my conversation partner will show me something that I had not seen before, will tell me something I had not heard before. Thus, humility and courage are both required to reach out to another person dialogically.

When we relate to one another more directly, we can acknowledge that we may not fully comprehend every facet of the topic that we are discussing. In dialogue, we remain open to seeing the world differently as a result of our encounter. This does not mean that one must be willing to convert to “the other side” in order for one to be open-minded enough to engage in dialogue. Especially when we are having a dialogue about matters of conviction, that would be a ludicrous demand to make. Rather, we must positively expect that through the encounter with the unique individual we are addressing, we can learn something. In dialogue, you do not need to believe that you could be wrong, but rather that there could be more facets of reality that you have not yet recognized. As John Cobb writes, “The issue is not whether one holds some truth as absolute, but whether one considers oneself to be in possession of all truth worth having.”¹⁰ If I approach a persuasive encounter dialogically, I will try to show my conversation partner the aspects of reality that I take to be most salient, and I will allow my conversation partner to respond, seeking to learn what aspects of reality are relevant from their perspective. I may leave the encounter even more convinced that my viewpoint is correct, but I may also walk away with a new appreciation of the concerns that drive my interlocutor and a deeper awareness of the complexity of the issue.

Dialogue is not about reaching agreement but about reaching understanding. This is simultaneously an understanding of one’s conversation partner and an understanding of the topic in question. Dialogically, to try to convince someone dialogically to change their mind is to strive to guide them to the truth, in recognition that there may be more

⁹ On the need for an alternation between the I-It and the I-Thou, see Maurice Friedman, *Martin Buber: T* (New York: Harper and Row, 1955), 73–74.

¹⁰ Quoted in Catherine Cornille, *The Possibility of Dialogue* (New York: Crossroad, 2008), 132.

of the truth than you fully comprehend. Even as you are working *a g a i n s t* their conclusions, you are working *w i t h* the conversation partner in a collaborative effort to apprehend the world better and to discern the most moral way to live in light of what is discovered in the dialogical encounter. Dialogue is mutually edifying even if no one's minds change, because in dialogue we are called back to the core of our being that seeks the truth.¹¹

Massive Mistrust

Our inability to communicate dialogically does not occur in a vacuum, and the factors that make dialogue rare are not only psychological but sociological. Polarization makes it difficult for us to engage dialogically with others who may disagree with our religious and political convictions.

Polarization should not be confused with disagreement.¹² Disagreement, even to the point of disruptive protest, is a vitally important part of political culture. Democracies thrive on healthy conflict, the voicing of disparate opinions, and struggles to discern the most just and equitable policies.¹³ In a room of one hundred people who disagree, you might hear a hundred different viewpoints, but people can understand each other and hash out their differences.

By contrast, polarization occurs when people seem to gather into two mutually opposed groups. As a society becomes more polarized, these groups become increasingly suspicious of one another. The diversity of viewpoints gets condensed into a simplified “us versus them,” and the pressure to defeat “them” fosters greater homogeneity on each side. In a room with one hundred people who are polarized, you’ll hear only two viewpoints, expressed antagonistically by groups who can’t stand one another.

In the United States, hostility and suspicion between Republicans and Democrats are much higher than in recent memory. However, this situation is not without precedent, and we are not without guidance. Seventy years ago, Buber shared a meditation on distrust that speaks directly to the contemporary American cultural-political divide.

¹¹ See Julia Galef, *The Scout Mindset: Why Some People Never Grow Up* (New York: Portfolio, 2021).

¹² An earlier version of this section appeared in “Martin Buber’s Hope in Polarized Times,” *Signs*, February 3, 2020, <https://divinity.uchicago.edu/signs/polarized-times/>.

¹³ See Jason A. Springs, *Healthy Conflict in Contemporary America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

At Carnegie Hall in 1952, Buber gave a lecture titled “Hope for this Hour.”¹⁴ His goal was to give an honest assessment of life during the escalating Cold War. He announced, “The human world is today, as never before, split into two camps, each of which understand the other as the embodiment of falsehood and itself as the embodiment of truth.”¹⁵ Buber does not advocate a centrist position between these two camps, nor does he here weigh in on the disputed points between them. Rather, he analyzes how this disagreement over economic philosophies is a site of polarization. He makes three points that are relevant for our contemporary social landscape.

First, we need to be critical of the way disagreements are framed. In polarization, Buber says, a person is “more than ever inclined to see his own principle in its original purity and the opposing one in its present deterioration, especially if the forces of propaganda confirm his instincts in order to make better use of them.” He continues, “Expressed in modern terminology, he believes that he has ideas, his opponent only ideologies. This obsession feeds the mistrust that incites the two camps.”¹⁶ Put differently, polarization attenuates critical thinking, making us all too easily satisfied that our commitments are right because they are superior to our opponents’. We also become less sensitive to distinctions and concerns of the other side, since we think we already know what *r e a l l* motivates their political behavior. Mistrust snowballs, then, as each side believes the other side is intentionally misrepresenting reality. Dialogue—with its demand on listening to the other person in the expectation that you may learn something from the interaction—can interrupt this escalating mistrust. Unless we hold ourselves to a high standard when inferring the motives and concerns of the other side, suspicion will get the better of truth. The dialogue partner can be an ally, then, in ensuring that we are not relying on an “us versus them” framework that oversimplifies the situation.

Second, we need “individuation,” which means not treating the other side as a monolith but recognizing that each person has unique convictions. One effect of polarization, Buber argues, is the transformation of ordinary mistrust into “massive mistrust.”¹⁷ It is normal and even necessary to treat with suspicion the claims of a person who has shown themselves to be untrustworthy. We should be leery of an individual who

¹⁴ Martin Buber, “Hope for this Hour,” in *P o i n t i n g* (New York: Harper and Row, 1957).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 220–221.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 221.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 222.

has made a pattern of playing fast and loose with the truth. However, any transition from distrusting an unreliable individual to distrusting an opposing camp is not a change of degree but of kind. The other side's speech becomes guilty until proven innocent; "one no longer merely fears that the other will voluntarily dissemble, but one simply takes it for granted that he cannot do otherwise."¹⁸ Polarization is not extreme disagreement, but the erosion of the conditions—like trust—necessary for working through disagreement.

The treatment Buber recommends for this metastasizing mistrust is seeing others as individuals and not simply as iterations of a devious "them." Overcoming this massive mistrust is especially difficult in the contemporary United States. On the one hand, conservative leaders have repeatedly cast doubt on the reliability of liberal media outlets. On the other hand, the former president is a person who has given ample reason to be distrusted, and it's hard for Democrats to separate sincere Republicans from the leader of their party. Still, studies show that if we approach people under the assumption we might be able to dialogue with them, we are more likely to foster mutual understanding.¹⁹ Seeing each person as more than just their political or religious affiliation is a step toward healthy disagreement and constructive change.

Third and finally, Buber argues that polarization threatens the pursuit of other political goods. Referring to the three watchwords of the French Revolution, *l i b e r t é , é g a l i t é ,* and *e n n e m i* Buber insists that liberty and equality will not survive long in the absence of fraternity. "The abstractions freedom and equality," Buber says, are held together "through the more concrete fraternity, for only if men feel themselves to be brothers can they partake of a genuine freedom from one another and a genuine equality with one another."²⁰ Extending Buber's point, I would add that if people do not believe they can cooperate with one another to achieve their political goals, then the more likely they will either become increasingly cynical or more willing to justify non-democratic uses of power. Naïvely overestimating the possibilities of brotherhood and cooperation is a legitimate concern, but cynically dismissing such possibilities becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

¹⁸ Ibid., 223.

¹⁹ William Swann, Virginia Kwan, Jeffrey Polzer, and Laurie Milton, "Fostering Group Identification and Creativity in Diverse Groups: The Role of Individuation and Self-Verification," *P e r s o n a l i t y a n d S o c i a l P s y c h o l o g y B u l l e t i n* (November 2003), 1396–1406.

²⁰ "Hope for this Hour," 221.

Reconciliation

“Hope for this Hour” concludes, not with a hopeful note, but with a challenge. Citizens need to push back against the forces of polarization. The flames of resentment and mistrust are fanned by politicians and journalists who stand to gain from a divided society, but these tactics only work as long as ordinary people allow them to. Buber states, “The hope for this hour depends upon the renewal of dialogical immediacy between men,” and this hope “depends upon the hoppers themselves, upon ourselves.”²¹ Only people who are willing to take the risk of dialogue can help our societies overcome the polarization that hinders us from recognizing the truth, from seeking justice together, and from seeing the face of God in one another.

The final word of the speech is distinctly theological. Buber writes, “At its core the conflict between mistrust and trust of man conceals the conflict between the mistrust and trust of eternity.”²² Reaching out to another in dialogue is a step in the direction of reaching out to God, if not an act of prayer itself. Thus, Buber’s hope resonates with the Christian hope that, by acting out of love for the neighbor and the enemy, we can discover anew the love of God in which minds are renewed, hearts are transformed, and enemies become sisters and brothers.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 228.

²² *Ibid.*, 229.

CONVERSATION AND CONVERSION: DIALOGUE AS WITNESS

By Donna Geernaert SC

We're all familiar with the children's chant: "Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me." While the chant's focus on avoiding physical violence is commendable, its assertion about the harmlessness of words is more debatable. Clearly, broken bones and bruises often heal more quickly than psychological injuries inflicted by bullying or demeaning words. The section on taming the tongue in the Epistle of James (3:1-12) highlights the power of words. "How great a forest is set ablaze by a small fire! And the tongue is a fire." The tongue, he says, "sets on fire the cycle of nature," and no one can tame it. "With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse those who are made in the image of God."

Ecumenical dialogue since the mid-twentieth century has led to a great deal of learning about the importance of words and how they are used. What is distinctive about dialogue, and which makes it potentially prophetic, is that in a dialogue, unlike in a debate, words are used not to dominate, control, or defeat another person but to build bridges of understanding. Words can divide or connect; in dialogue, the intent is to establish connections and heal relationships.

The Nature and Purpose of Ecumenical Dialogue

Writing before the beginning of the third session of the Second Vatican Council, Pope Paul VI (in his first encyclical, *Humanae Salutis*, August 6, 1964) reflects on the compelling motives for the Church's dialogue with the world in which it lives. Catholics, he says, are called to dialogue principally because of their faith. The basis for this involvement lies, first of all, in the mystery of God, Three-in-One, where Christian revelation allows us to glimpse a life of communion and interchange. Created by this Three-in-One God, being in relationship is a fundamental dimension of being human. Secondly, this same Trinitarian God creates humans free and able to enter into relationship with God and with one another. And, when freedom is lost through sin, God in an age-long dialogue, continues to offer salvation to humanity and all creation. Clearly, it is God who takes the initiative in this dialogue of salvation. In fact, the very person of the Incarnate Word, fully human and fully divine, gives concrete expression to

this call to dialogue. Thus, those who follow Christ, are called by their human and Christian vocation, to live dialogue in their daily lives.¹

Writing some thirty years later, Pope John Paul II includes a lengthy reflection on dialogue in his encyclical, on *C o m m i t m e n t E c u m e (U i t s m U n u) m H e B e g i n s* by identifying the capacity for dialogue as basic to the very nature of persons and their dignity. Rooted in today's personalist way of thinking, dialogue is an indispensable step toward the self-realization of human individuals and communities. Not just cognitive, it involves the subjectivity of each participant. "Dialogue," he says, is "a natural instrument for comparing differing points of view and, above all, for examining those differences which exist among Christians."² With regard to areas of disagreement, he recalls, "the Council requires that the whole body of doctrine be clearly presented. At the same time, it asks that the manner and method of expounding the faith should not be a hindrance to dialogue with our brothers and sisters. Certainly it is possible to profess one's faith and to explain its teaching in a way that is correct, fair and understandable, and which at the same time takes into account both the way of thinking and the actual historical experiences of the other party." Further, he states, "all forms of reductionism or facile 'agreement' must be absolutely avoided. Serious questions must be resolved, for if not, they will reappear at another time, either in the same terms or in a different guise."³

In May 2004, the Joint Working Group (JWG) between the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (PCPCU) and the World Council of Churches (WCC) published a study paper on "The Nature and Purpose of Ecumenical Dialogue."⁴ A follow-up to its 1967 report on ecumenical dialogue, this text intends "to encourage the churches to continue their ecumenical dialogue with commitment and perseverance." In contemporary society, fuelled by fundamentalism, new experiences of vulnerability and the impact of globalization: "Dialogue has become a *s i n e q u a* for nations, churches and cultures. . . . [it] is an imperative arising from the Gospel, which thus presents a counterchallenge to those who would adopt exclusivist positions."⁵ Established and sponsored by ecclesiastical authorities, ecumenical dialogue is ecclesial. Those who are

¹Paul VI, *E c c l e s i a m*, 58-59.

²John Paul II, *U t U n u*, no. 36.

³Ibid.

⁴Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, *I n f o r m a t i o n S e r* (2004): pp. 204-214, Hereafter cited as NPED.

⁵NPED, no. 1, p. 204.

appointed to these dialogues, whether bilateral or multilateral, “come as representatives of their ecclesial tradition, seeking to represent their tradition while exploring the divine mysteries with representatives of other traditions.” All participants “stand within the discipline of their tradition and are accountable to it.”⁶ While committed to representing their own ecclesial traditions, dialogue participants are also partners in the search for Christian unity. Dialogue “requires seeing the other differently,” changing “patterns of thinking, speaking and acting toward the other.” At times, it also requires examining how a particular ecclesial identity “has been constructed in opposition to the other . . . distinguishing between confessional identity as a sign of fidelity to faith, and confessionalism as an ideology constructed in enmity to the other.”⁷

Pursued in response to Jesus’ prayer for his disciples, “that they may all be one so that the world may believe” (John 17:21), ecumenical dialogue is essentially a conversation, a speaking and listening between partners. It assumes an equality of participants working together for Christian unity so that partners “are not expected to adopt ‘our’ structures for dialogue.”⁸ In ecumenical dialogue, moreover, “we meet not as strangers but as co-dwellers in the household of God, as Christians who through our communion with the Triune God already experience “a real, though imperfect communion.”⁹ Dialogue entails walking together and pilgrimage is an apt metaphor. The biblical narrative of the disciples on the road to Emmaus may offer a kind of pedagogy for the encounter—sometimes dialogue begins simply by journeying with others and being open to their existential situation. As each participant speaks from his or her own context and ecclesial perspective, partners are challenged to listen deeply, to enter into the other’s experience and to see the world through the eyes of the other.¹⁰ Dialogue partners may even see another’s wounds and weaknesses with a new sympathy. In the words of Cardinal Kasper: “we have begun to learn—and let me hasten to say this is a reciprocal learning—what it means to walk with each other amidst difficulties, to carry the burdens of the other.”¹¹

⁶NPED, nos., 33, 56, pp. 208, 210.

⁷NPED, no. 40, p. 208.

⁸NPED, no. 34, p. 208, with reference to *Ut Unum. 28 i n t*

⁹NPED, no. 28, p. 207, quoting *Un i t a t i s R œ 3 d i n t e g r a t i o*

¹⁰NPED, nos., 19-20, p. 206.

¹¹Homily given at vespers service at Santa Maria Sopra Minerva, November 24, 2006. *I n f o r m a t i l 23 (2006): 40. 1 c e*

The Practice of Ecumenical Dialogue

The Canadian Roman Catholic–United Church dialogue may serve to illustrate some of the principles outlined in the JWG report. Established through the action of the General Council of the United Church (UCC) and the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCCB), the group began to meet in 1975. Appointed by the UCC’s Inter-Church and Inter-Faith Relations Committee and the CCCC’s Episcopal Commission for Ecumenism, the participants were highly committed to improving relationships between the two churches. In 1982, the group published a report¹² outlining its understanding of its mandate, the dialogue process adopted to achieve its goals, and an expression of its hopes for greater unity. With this in mind, participants decided early in 1985 to address the controversial topic of abortion. In the public debate of the day, Roman Catholic and United Church positions were seen as diametrically opposed. As both churches insist that their positions arise from a fundamental commitment to the Gospel, the group sought to understand how similar values can lead to dissimilar outcomes. Perhaps the greatest challenge to the dialogue participants lay in their efforts to uncover, recognize and affirm the core values at the root of each church’s position.

Here, the dialogue process employed by the group was very helpful. Over the years, it had been the practice to meet in full sessions with the entire group and then to break into separate Roman Catholic or United Church “caucus” groups. This method proved particularly useful because it enabled the members of the dialogue to check on the accuracy of what they thought their partners had said. As the dialogue began, Roman Catholic and United Church participants presented their churches’ official positions on the topic. This is an essential step because the purpose of a bilateral dialogue is to bring churches together, not simply to examine the views of individual members of a particular church. As the group followed its usual practice of alternating between full and caucus groups, an interesting phenomenon emerged. When United Church participants returned from their caucus group and reported what they had heard of the views expressed by the Catholic participants, there was often surprise on the part of the Catholics who thought they had said something quite different. For the United Church participants, there was often similar surprise at what the Catholics thought they had heard of the United Church’s positions. What the group discovered was just how hard it is to hear what another person or group is saying, especially if you think you already know what they are going to say. In this dialogue experience, all

¹²Canadian Centre for Ecumenism, *E c u m e* 65 (1982).

of the participants learned a good deal about the discipline of careful listening. This dialogue did not reach consensus. Given the clear differences between our two churches, this would have been highly unlikely. What we did achieve, however, was a commitment to move beyond stereotypes, and a greater understanding of the reasons for our differences on this topic.

At the time of the Reformation, bilateral dialogues took place between Catholics and Lutherans, Lutherans and Anglicans, Reformed and Lutherans. The beginning of the 20th century saw dialogues between Anglicans and Catholics (1921-1926), Anglicans and Orthodox (1930 ff), Anglicans and Old Catholics (1931), Lutherans and Reformed (1947 ff). In the 1960s, however, there was a new emphasis on and sudden surge of bilateral dialogues on both international and national levels. Two factors contributed to this development: 1) multilateral conversations, especially through the WCC's Faith and Order Commission; 2) the Roman Catholic Church officially entered the ecumenical movement. With its strong sense of identity and universality, the Catholic Church developed a natural preference for bilateral dialogues. Other churches, particularly those which also have a strong sense of identity and worldwide coherence in doctrine, worship and practice took up dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church and subsequently among themselves. Reports of these dialogues have been published in four volumes of *G r o w t h i n* (1984, 2000, 2007, n t 2017). A disadvantage of bilateral dialogues may be the danger of isolating the individual dialogues from each other and of losing sight of the indivisibility of the ecumenical movement. In order to counteract this danger, the Faith and Order Commission has hosted ten forums on bilateral dialogues (1978, 1979, 1980, 1985, 1990, 1995, 1997, 2001, 2008, 2012). In fact, as these forums demonstrate, the multilaterals provide a framework of common orientations for the bilaterals, and both appear to enrich each other with their insights. This seems evident in the choice of theme for the upcoming WCC General Assembly.

WCC 11th General Assembly Theme

In 2022, the WCC will hold its 11th General Assembly in Karlsruhe, Germany, with a call for an “ecumenism of the heart” in a broken world. A 24-page reflection booklet¹³ on the Assembly theme, “Christ’s love moves the world to reconciliation and unity,” notes this is the first time “love” has been part of an assembly theme. God’s foremost attitude to the

¹³ www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/01/ENG_WCC_2022_Assembly_Booklet_PAG

world is love which “more than ideas and ideals, gathers, inspires and creates unity.” As the language of our faith, love “can actively and prophetically engage the world as we see and experience it today in a way that will make a difference for a shared tomorrow.”¹⁴ “Those who are in Christ, ...are called to do so in this world, ...living as a sign and a foretaste of the kingdom to come and making visible the love that fills our hearts with joy, even on the bleakest days.”¹⁵ Churches are called to be a sign of this sacrificial love of Christ. “This witness does not come from human effort alone . . . but is made possible by the love of Christ working in us.” Further, churches are not only witnesses to the world but, as part of the world God has made, “Already, within the church itself, the world is being gathered into unity.”¹⁶

Differing understandings about the nature and mission of the church have been either an overarching or an underlying theme in many ecumenical dialogues over the years, and in this context, the concept of *k o i n* (communian) has emerged as central to the quest for a common understanding of the church and its visible unity. Dialogue about the reign of God has also affirmed the notion of *k o i n* as descriptive of the right relationships God wills for the whole of creation. Bringing the two themes together, there is an emerging consensus about the relationship between the church and the reign of God in which the church, precisely as *k o i n*, *o n i* is affirmed as a sign, instrument, and foretaste, as a “kind of sacrament” of God’s eschatological reign. Of particular interest is the third phase of the international Reformed—Roman Catholic dialogue on *The Church Community of Common Witness*¹⁷ which made use of case studies from Canada, South Africa, and Northern Ireland to explore how the two churches discern their service to the reign of God within contemporary situations. In the final chapter of their report, members of this dialogue group affirmed the dialogue itself as a form of common witness as well as a challenge to renewal in both churches. They assert, “In a fundamental sense, our dialogue itself is already an act of common witness, a reconciling experience that calls for further reconciliation of memories as obedience leads us to unity in faith and action, to a common

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 7, 8.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 2.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 7.

¹⁷Reformed—Roman Catholic International Dialogue, “The Church as Community of Common Witness to the Kingdom of God,” *Informational Series* 25 (2007): pp. 110-156. Hereafter cited as, CCKG.

witness in which the signs of the Kingdom are shared with the poor.”¹⁸

The participants then offer their reflections on a spirituality of dialogue. For Christians, spirituality implies “putting on the mind of Christ.” Paul’s letter to the Philippians (2:5-11) describes the incarnation of Christ as a process of “self-emptying” for the sake of humanity. This text suggests a profoundly spiritual process which can be applied to dialogue. Those who engage in dialogue must be prepared to let go of preconceived notions about the other and “enter into a process of self-giving, a type of imitation of Christ crucified. In light of the paschal mystery, dialogue purifies its participants so that each can approach the other with the freedom that comes from taking on the mind of Christ.”¹⁹ In the Gospels, Jesus approaches others on their own terms and with great respect. He offers his message to all, calls some to follow him in a special way, but forces none to be his disciples. In brief, he initiates a dialogue of love which always respects the freedom of the other. While acknowledging that the fullness of truth has been revealed in Jesus Christ, individual Christians “have no guarantee that they have grasped that truth fully” and so there must be a constant openness to come to a deeper knowledge of the truth. “In the last analysis truth is not a thing we possess, but a person by whom we have allowed ourselves to be possessed. This is an unending process.”²⁰ Basic to any dialogue is an attitude of humility, a readiness to admit ignorance and failures, a desire for deeper knowledge, an openness to truth wherever it is found. Those who wish to enter into contact and establish collaboration with others first of all need to be open to conversion, open to the action of the Holy Spirit within themselves, seeking to discern and do God’s will. And, the more the partners in dialogue “seek the face of God” (Ps 27:8), the nearer they will come to each other and the better chance they will have of understanding each other. Openness to God’s activity within oneself is not only the starting point of dialogue, but also a constant element in its unfolding process. It is a freedom for God, and in God, for one’s brothers and sisters.

Healing/Reconciliation of Memories

While doctrinal agreement is important, dialogue aims, as well, at the healing of memories through repentance and mutual forgiveness. In the words of Pope John Paul II: “Christians cannot underestimate the burden of *l o n g a n d i n g i n h e r i t e d f r o m t h e p a s t*, and of mutual

¹⁸CCCWKG, nos. 12, 198, pp. 112, 145-146.

¹⁹CCCKG, no. 201, p. 146.

²⁰CCCKG, no. 203, p. 146, quoting *E c c l e s i , 1 7 8 2 S u a m*

mi s u n d e r and *parnedj i und* With the grace of the Holy Spirit, the Lord's disciples, inspired by love, by the power of the truth and by a sincere desire for mutual forgiveness and reconciliation, are called to *r e e x a m i n e t o g e t h* and the hurt which that past regretfully continues to provoke even today."²¹ Historical research is integral to developing a shared interpretation of the past and new points of departure for current dialogue.

Meeting from 1984-1990, members of the international Reformed/Roman Catholic dialogue dedicated the first chapter of their second report, *T o w a r d a C o m m o n U n d e r*,²² to a reconciliation of memories. The text was produced through a method which saw each delegation draft its respective history separately. The drafts were then read and reviewed together, enabling the dialogue partners to learn from each other and to modify what had been written. Participants were reminded that the past had often been marked by misunderstandings of motive and language. "We occasionally heard each other speak vehemently and felt some of the passions that dictated the course of historical events and still in some ways drive us today."²³ This section of the dialogue report illustrates the participants' commitment to deepening their "shared historical understanding and has contributed to a certain reassessment of the past." They state: "We have begun to dissolve myths about each other, to clear away misunderstandings." Yet, they agree a further step is needed: "We must go on from here, to a *r e c o n c* of memories, in which we will begin to share one sense of the past instead of two."²⁴

This is, in fact, what the international Lutheran—Roman Catholic Commission on Unity's 2013 report *F r o m C o n f l i c t*²⁵ attempts to do. Seeking to commemorate the 500th anniversary of the beginning of the Reformation in an ecumenical and global age, the authors of this report maintain that dialogue has enabled them to overcome traditional prejudices and find a common way of remembering past events.

²¹*U t U n u, no. 2S i n t*

²²Reformed—Roman Catholic International Dialogue, "Towards a Common Understanding of the Church," *I n f o r m a t i 74(1990)S pp. 9 h-11 8c e* Hereafter cited as TCUC.

²³TCUC, no. 15, p. 93.

²⁴TCUC, no. 16, p. 93.

²⁵Lutheran—Roman Catholic Commission on Unity, "From Conflict to Communion: Lutheran—Catholic Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017," *I n f o r m a t i 44 (2014): pp. h25-158e* Hereafter cited as CC.

What happened in the past cannot be changed but “what is remembered of the past and how it is remembered, can, with the passage of time, indeed change. While the past itself is unalterable, the presence of the past in the present is alterable . . . the point is not to tell a different history, but to tell that history differently.”²⁶ The text includes chapters on the Lutheran Reformation and the Catholic Response, and a review of basic themes of Martin Luther’s theology in light of the Lutheran—Catholic dialogues. A section on evaluating the past notes: “Sixteenth century divisions were rooted in different understandings of the truth of the Christian faith and were particularly contentious since salvation was seen to be at stake.”²⁷ Also, in the battle for public opinion, controversialists were clearly more interested in refuting their opponents than in looking for common ground. “Prejudices and misunderstandings played a great role in the characterizations of the other side.”²⁸ Shared research has been particularly helpful in highlighting the number of socio-economic, political and cultural factors affecting doctrinal positions. With this as background, dialogue partners are more able to hear one another and to develop new understandings and relationships.

Concluding Thoughts

While some will say that “talk is cheap,” the same cannot be said about ecumenical dialogue which requires commitment, prayer, and ultimately action. For those who have been involved in ecumenical dialogue over several years, progress can seem very slow, even glacial at times. The words spoken by Cardinal Kasper at the Mississauga Consultation of Anglican/Roman Catholic Bishops inspire hope: “God will always surprise us . . . Faith means to be open to God . . . a faith that does not take account of wonder is meaningless and ineffective . . . It is true that in the course of history we have done much against love and unity, but God—and this is our hope—will make things good again.”²⁹

The upcoming WCC General Assembly will gather participants from around the world, meeting as a fellowship of churches, “to encourage one another as we celebrate the love that, through the Holy Spirit, moves, heals and empowers us.”³⁰ As signs to the world of the coming Reign of

²⁶CC, no. 16, p. 128.

²⁷CC, no. 232, pp. 154-155.

²⁸CC, no. 233, p. 155.

²⁹“Meditation on Acts 13:30-33,” *One in Christ* 39, Number 1 (January 2004): pp. 53-55.

³ www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/01/ENG_WCC_2022_Assembly_p.2_Booklet_PAG

God, churches are called to embody “a faith that is at once rooted in passionate commitment and eager for expansive dialogue.”³¹ May this assembly with its focus on an ecumenism of the heart be for the churches and the world at large a Gospel witness to the Christian meaning of love and the kind of unity for which Jesus prayed.

³¹Ibid., p. 8.

ECUMENICAL WITNESS FOR TRANSFORMATION: REFLECTIONS ON A PILGRIMAGE OF JUSTICE AND PEACE

By Gail Allan

You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, to be known and read by all; and you show that you are a letter of Christ, prepared by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts (2 Corinthians 3:2-3, NRSV).

At the close of the World Council of Churches 10th Assembly in 2013, the Assembly Message invited member churches and Christians around the world into an Ecumenical Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace:

We intend to move together. Challenged by our experiences in Busan, we challenge all people of good will to engage their God-given gifts in transforming actions. This Assembly calls you to join us in pilgrimage. May the churches be communities of healing and compassion, and may we seed the Good News so that justice will grow and God's deep peace rest on the world.¹

One way of enacting the pilgrimage has been a program of pilgrim team visits (PTVs), modelled on earlier "Living Letters" initiatives developed during the Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women (1988-1998) and the Decade to Overcome Violence (2001-2010). These visits offer insights into key elements for a practice of ecumenism that arises from the lived experience of people who come together in faithful response to the cries of a hurting world. How does this model of ecumenical witness through active presence contribute to a pilgrimage of justice and peace that deepens commitment both to unity and to God's mission of transformative justice?

¹ World Council of Churches, "Join the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace," Assembly Message from the 10th Assembly of the WCC in Busan, 2013, in *Walking Together: Theological Reflections on the Ecumenical Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace*, ed. Susan Durber and Fernando Enns (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2018), 142. While the image of pilgrimage has had resonance from many perspectives, the challenges of the term have been acknowledged in many discussions.

Path toward Pilgrimage: Linking Faith and Action

The immediate impetus for this invitation to pilgrimage was a call from the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation, held in Kingston, Jamaica in 2011, which closed out the WCC Decade to Overcome Violence with a vision of “just peace” that “invites us to join in a common journey and to commit ourselves to building a culture of peace.”² The Busan assembly in 2013 asserted that “the way of just peace provides a basic frame of reference for coherent ecumenical reflection, spirituality, engagement and active peacemaking.”³

This intent to bring together various strands of the ecumenical life of the churches—in particular the work of the WCC—into an encompassing frame, able to contain both the call to Christian unity and the conviction that unity is fostered in participation in God’s mission of transformation, has impacted the programmatic life of the Council for most of its existence. At each moment the effort to imagine and live into ways of bringing Christian witness to bear in the contexts of suffering and injustice has generated new insights in theology and ethics, and new models for faithful discipleship and ecumenical action.

In the years following the founding of the WCC in 1948, the concept of the responsible society called Christians “to live in response to God’s act of redemption in Christ, in any society, even within the most unfavourable social structures.”⁴ As voices from member churches in the global South grew stronger there was a call for churches to engage actively in movements for justice and liberation. Attention to human rights, racism and sexism, and militarism and disarmament at the 1975 Nairobi assembly was reflected in a program focus on “A Just, Participatory and Sustainable Society.”⁵

At the 1983 Assembly in Vancouver the growing conviction that the stories of people struggling for justice in situations of poverty and exploitation needed to be the basis for ecumenical theology and ethics was reflected in the declaration that “to engage member churches in a conciliar

² Mathews George Chunakara, ed., *Building Peace on Earth: Report of the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2013), 41.

³ “Statement on the Way of Just Peace, WCC Busan 2013,” in *Walking Together*, 144.

⁴ Ans van der Bent, *Commitment to God World: A Concise Critical Survey of Ecumenical Social Thought* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1995), 62, citing *The Evanston Report* (London: SCM Press, 1955), 113.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 35-38, 45-46.

process of mutual commitment (covenant) to justice, peace and the integrity of all creation should be a priority for World Council programmes.”⁶ A world conference in Seoul in 1990 developed affirmations for the Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation process, intended to “express aptly the unity of faith and life, theological conviction and moral action.”⁷

Another step in this continuing journey of linking faith and action came at the WCC’s Jubilee Assembly in Harare in 1998, with the affirmation of the policy statement “Common Understanding and Vision.” Affirming the Council as a fellowship of churches acting together, the CUV document urged the organization to “give priority to reflection and deliberation on the key issues facing the church in the world,” and “provide a setting and process in which the voices of all can be truly heard,” while attending to the “coherence and coordination” of theology and action, and the “intimate relations between the local and the global.”⁸ This vision of the Council’s role would inform program work in the 21st century, including the Decade to Overcome Violence and the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace.

From Just Peace to Pilgrimage

At the Busan assembly the Just Peace Statement set the stage for the pilgrimage by naming the path of just peace as a “collective, dynamic yet grounded process” where “peace constitutes a pattern of life that reflects human participation in God’s love for all creation.”⁹ Following the assembly the Central Committee gave further definition to the invitation to pilgrimage, emphasizing its theological dimensions. Asserting that a pilgrimage of justice and peace is a “transformative journey” in

⁶ “Report of the Assembly’s Programme Guidelines Committee,” in David Gill, ed., *Gathered for Life: Official Report VI Assembly World Council of Churches, Vancouver, Canada 24 July - 10 August 1983* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1983), 255.

⁷ Heinz Joachim Held, “Report of the Moderator,” in Michael Kinnamon, ed., *Signs of the Spirit: Official Report Seventh Assembly, Canberra, Australia 7-20 February 1991* (Geneva, WCC Publications, 1991), 135.

⁸ “Common Understanding and Vision of the WCC (CUV),” par. 3.15.2, 3, 4; 3.16.4. <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/common-understanding-and-vision-of-the-wcc-cuv>.

⁹ “Statement on the Way of Just Peace, WCC Busan 2013” in *Walking Together: Theological Reflections on the Ecumenical Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace*, ed. Susan Durber and Fernando Enns (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2018), 143-148.

anticipation of the reign of God, the invitation outlines the “local and global affronts to the gospel values of justice and peace:” climate disaster, poverty, violence, war and resulting migration, persistent gender inequality. Participating in pilgrimage “will involve individuals, parishes, communities on local, regional, and international levels re-visiting the greatest needs in their particular contexts, reflecting on those needs in light of the gospel values, and being inspired to act in concert with others.”¹⁰ The pilgrimage was not to be a program, but rather a framework or lens through which to view every aspect of the Council’s work, and to offer to member churches as a way to understand their own work and relationships.

The invitation described three dimensions of pilgrimage that have become touchstones for the wide range of activities that have been woven into the process. Celebrating the gifts (*via positiva*) names the empowering grace of walking together and receiving the gifts of God’s creation. Visiting the wounds (*via negativa*) involves listening prayerfully for God’s presence in the midst of violence, injustice and exclusion. Transforming the injustice (*via transformativa*) is a call to resist evil and seek healing and reconciliation through concrete action.¹¹

It is clear that pilgrimage serves as a powerful metaphor for the efforts of churches to journey together in a spirit of unity toward the hope and promise of justice and peace. However, for many engaged in planning for the Council’s work post-Busan, including its intersections with the work of local churches and ecumenical partners, pilgrimage could not be only image or metaphor. To give life to a pilgrimage of justice and peace, the assembly declaration that “we will move together” requires concrete forms of expression within the contexts of pain and struggle from which the call for just peace emerged. Recalling a history of pilgrimage as “a robust social practice,”¹² Commission on Faith and Order moderator Susan Durber insists: “Following an incarnate Christ, and the God who in him so loved the world, has to mean practising faith, doing things, engaging with world, and seeking to part of God’s transformation of all the ways in which we are social, connected, and related to one another.”¹³

¹⁰ WCC Central Committee, “An Invitation to the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace Revised,” Doc. No. GEN 05 rev, https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/default/files/Document/GEN05rev_APPR_OVED_InvitationPilgrimageJusticePeace.pdf.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 3-4.

¹² Susan Durber, “Pilgrimage in the Protestant Imagination: A Renewed Path toward Justice, Peace, and Unity,” in *Walking Together*, 57.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 61.

Pilgrim team visits have become an important means of living into this practice of connection and community. Visits were organized on a regional basis, each reflecting a thematic focus of particular relevance to that region, and related to broadly defined themes identified for the pilgrimage as a whole: life-affirming economies, climate change, nonviolent peace-building and reconciliation and human dignity. In addition, a series of Women’s Team Visits, titled “Walking Her Stories,” was organized as it became apparent that specific attention was needed to bring women’s experiences into view. Visiting teams were composed of diverse representatives of WCC member churches from both within and outside the region. In this way opportunities have been opened for practices of accompaniment and mutual accountability that have the potential to engender deeper engagement in processes of peacemaking and justice seeking:

Pilgrim Team Visits express solidarity with churches and people who live in contexts of violence, injustice, and oppression, strengthening the ecumenical network among the churches, national councils of churches and related organizations. As a journey participating in God’s mission, Pilgrim Team Visits seek a mutual transformation of people—both visitors and hosts—walking together on the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace.¹⁴

Visits were moved online in the context of the pandemic. While the essential elements of the model remained, the virtual format made possible additional participants. I had the opportunity to participate in online visits in North America, as well as a June 2021 harvesting event that included both reporting on North American visits and gathering learnings from across the different regions in relation to truth and trauma, land and displacement, gender justice, and racism, themes that emerged from the visits around the world. I also listened to video recordings of reflections on several women’s pilgrimage visits in preparing a summary report of the “Walking Her Stories” program. I draw on these experiences to illustrate key contributions of these visits to the ecumenical journey.

An Embodied Witness

Durber relates the pilgrimage of justice and peace to “an ecumenism of the body” that engages participants in “a common walk

¹⁴ “Pilgrim Team Visits,” <https://www.oikoumene.org/what-we-do/pilgrimage-justice-and-peace#pilgrim-team-visits>.

outwards into the world.”¹⁵ To view pilgrimage from this perspective is consistent with the notion of an embodied ecumenical practice described in the 1990s Faith and Order study process on Ecclesiology and Ethics. Growing out of the study’s focus on the church as moral community, the study describes moral formation as the basis for ethical engagement in Christian communities, affirming that “such formation compels us to a bodily form of witness.”¹⁶ Asserting that embodied engagement with the world necessarily points us to the “immediate necessities of our local situation,” the study declares that “*oikoumene* is best understood not by trying to reach some generalized global vision but by fostering a worldwide communion of particular, local embodiments of acted-out, shared obedience to the gospel.”¹⁷

Pilgrim team visits can be seen as an instance of embodied ecumenical practice. Whether in the physical form of pre-pandemic visits, or in pandemic-necessitated virtual form, visitors entered into the presence of receiving communities, sharing laughter and tears, witnessing the impact of injustice in people’s daily existence, as well as the concrete changes being made by movements of resistance and transformation. Participants noted the power in praying together; the creation of safe spaces to share pain, struggle and hard truths; and the transformative effect of the choice to be present, open to discomfort and “broken by those who are broken.”¹⁸

Storytelling from the Margins

A growing emphasis in the work of the WCC leading into the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace has been “mission from the margins.” Noting Jesus’ relationship with marginalized people in his society, the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism statement *Together Towards Life* affirms that “people on the margins have agency, and can often see what, from the centre, is out of view. . . . Through struggles in and for life, marginalized people are reservoirs of the active hope, collective resistance, and perseverance that are needed to remain faithful to the promised reign of

¹⁵ Durber, “Pilgrimage,” 63, 57.

¹⁶ “Costly Obedience,” in *Ecclesiology and Ethics: Ecumenical Ethical Engagement, Moral Formation and the Nature of the Church*, ed. Thomas F. Best and Martin Robra (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1997), 74, par. 76.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 74, par. 77; 66, par. 50.

¹⁸ Brandi Friesen reporting on Nigeria PTV during Harvest Gathering, 10 June 2021.

God.”¹⁹ A CWME study paper emphasizes that attending to the often “unheard and unheeded” voices of the margins includes the responsibility to “discern, listen and partake” in the powerful and transformative theologies emerging from marginalized communities.²⁰ A commitment to mission from the margins challenges the global church to respond to God’s work “primarily at the very local level where most communities of the margins are encountered in mission and ministry.”²¹

The methodology of pilgrim team visits creates the occasion for story-telling that lays bare the struggle and hope of those who have been marginalized in the economic and social forces of domination and exclusion. Visitors accepted an invitation to place themselves on the *via negativa*, open to the wounds of those they would accompany. During the women’s pilgrimages, participants heard stories of the trauma of conflict, poverty, and sexual and gender-based violence. North American visits focused on the experiences of Indigenous and Black communities, with stories of the impact of colonialism and climate change, dispossession and displacement, assimilation and intergenerational trauma. Reports brought to the June 2021 Harvest Gathering from pilgrimage visits in every region made clear that such deep sharing of wounds was part of every visit.

Shari Stone-Mediatore has theorized the value of storytelling for the work of social transformation. She argues that stories of marginalized people’s experiences have value *as stories* because “they bring into public view the social pressures and social alternatives that have shaped many people’s daily lives but that have been systematically omitted from ruling narratives.”²² PTVs exemplified a process of bringing into public view the lived experiences of churches and people in contexts of violence, injustice and oppression and making these experiences visible to the wider church. In North America visit hosts emphasized the importance of being heard in truth-telling that includes the role of the church in colonialism and perpetuating structures and attitudes of white supremacy. A women’s pilgrimage host in Sudan spoke of the visit as creating a safe space for women to break silence and pour out their pain; she also noted how this

¹⁹ Jooseop Kim, ed., *Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes with a Practical Guide* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2013), 15, par. 38, 16, par. 39.

²⁰ David W. Scott and Jerome Sahabandhu, “Study Paper: ‘Reimagining Mission from the Margins,’” in *Call to Discipleship: Mission in the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace*, ed. Risto Jukko (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2021), 62, 60, 63.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 67.

²² Shari Stone-Mediatore, *Reading Across Borders: Storytelling and Knowledges of Resistance* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 158.

became a moment for Sudanese church leaders to receive information about women's experiences of violence and exploitation.²³

To witness, however, is not only to hear stories of pain and struggle. Stories of gifts to be celebrated—the *via positiva*—were also shared. In the North American visits these included theologies rooted in sacredness of land, Indigenous cosmologies valuing interconnectedness, mutuality and hope, and work against racism and toward truth, healing and reconciliation. Participants in women's pilgrimage visits experienced the courage, resistance and resilience of women breaking silence and seeking resources for healing and transformation. This sharing of gifts can be seen as part of what the Ecclesiology and Ethics study identified as *oikodomé*, an “intentional mutual upbuilding” of the whole community that is the product of shared ecumenical formation and moral witness.²⁴ For people to be seen and heard in the fullness of their experience, encompassing courage and resilience as well as pain and struggle is a resource of hope offered in this process of witness and accompaniment.

Transformed in Relationship

The third dimension named for the path of pilgrimage is *via transformativa*, transforming injustice. The transformative vision is one of right relations, and points to another value of the team visit methodology for the strengthening of ecumenical engagement. To be present, to listen, to witness, to act together, is to build relationship. The CWME Working Group on Theology for Mission describes well this dynamic:

Dialogue is not simply listening, but engaging
recognizing each other
being vulnerable to one another
sharing one's whole self in hospitality
co-creating a safe space for speaking and hearing
and a sufficient holding of anxiety and ambiguity.²⁵

Participants in “Walking Her Stories” visits spoke of new understanding of women's unity and solidarity: vulnerability and trust, joining hearts,

²³ Moma Gladys Dommy Mananyu, video recording shared with me by WCC Just Community of Women and Men for preparation of script for “Walking Her Stories” video publication (forthcoming).

²⁴ “Costly Obedience,” 60-61, par. 34, 35.

²⁵ “Missiological Exploration on the 2022 WCC Assembly Theme Christ's Love Moves the World to Reconciliation and Unity and Ongoing Work of CWME” in *Call to Discipleship*, 45.

building bridges, and creating long term relationships. There was a strong sense of being accompanied in struggle, and hope for relationships to be the basis for partnership and collaboration in advocacy and action for transformation.

The witness offered by Christians engaged in pilgrimage is not that of bystanders taking in experiences and returning to life as it was. As Stone-Mediatore affirms, critical social praxis that holds together story and analysis discloses possibilities for resistance in everyday life. Storytelling is accompanied by choices and responsibilities; undertaken as a collective practice of hard and risky work, it enlarges moral agency.²⁶ The engaged witness of pilgrimage is a commitment to continue to move together. It is an entry into relationship that claims accountability for what is done in view of the experiences shared.

Solidarity, Accountability and Action

In the pilgrim team visits, mutual accountability is a dynamic with implications for both visitors and hosts. Current Moderator of the WCC Central Committee, Agnes Abuom, writes that in the search for just peace “for the enormous task we face every local church needs the accompaniment of churches from other regions in shared solidarity and mutual accountability.”²⁷ Settler Christians who participated in North American visits reflected on the truth of our participation in the colonial project that resulted in residential schools, violence, poverty and intergenerational trauma. The PTVs bear witness to our telling of this truth, inviting us into accountability to the global community for our actions or failure to act.

The bodily witness of PTVs is a promise of ecumenical solidarity and accountability given form in the willingness of the global fellowship to be present to and shaped by those whose witness from the margins calls all our words about just peace to be translated into the discipleship of pilgrims on a journey of justice and peace. The power of witness in this ecumenical journeying together is found in the will to take the lived experience of visiting wounds and celebrating gifts into an ecumenically active, globally shared engagement in transforming injustices—giving life to the call for a just peace.

²⁶ Stone-Mediatore, *Reading Across Borders*, 155-158, 91-94, 150-152.

²⁷ Agnes Abuom, “A Pilgrimage toward a “Just Peace” Church—in Ecumenical Diversity,” in *Walking Together*, 10.

Continuing the Journey

As the WCC moves towards its 11th Assembly this summer, efforts have been made to gather the learning from PTVs and there is evidence that this experience will continue to shape ecumenical work toward justice and peace as the Council moves beyond Karlsruhe. As churches enter into a new phase of the journey, the methodology of team visits invites further exploration:

- How are relationships created during visits sustained and translated into joint actions of solidarity and accountability?
- As visits weave together storytelling, analysis, worship and action, how do these experiences of life together contribute to the integral dynamic of unity, justice and peace which has been claimed as fundamental to the pilgrimage?
- What are the entry points for these experiences of mission from the margins to shape/reshape the theological witness of the Council and its member churches? What are the contributions of these experiences of telling, listening, weeping and celebration to ecumenical theology that undergirds the declaration that “we will move together?”

Since Busan, the Pilgrimage of Justice and Peace has served as a strong image naming a “way and praxis”²⁸ for the WCC and its member churches. As “living letters,” the pilgrim team visits’ model of storytelling, deep listening, relationship and accountability represents a practice of ecumenism that is indeed “written in human hearts.”

²⁸ Konrad Raiser, *The Challenge of Transformation: An Ecumenical Journey* (WCC Publications: 2018), 212.

FAITH AND ORDER: WHAT'S IT TO YOU?

By Sandra Beardsall

Introduction

If the world is getting you down (and it just might be) I recommend a visit to the website of the World Council of Churches. It is colourful, engaging, and always up-to-date. Its articles are timely and unafraid of the politics of the church or the world. Even when the news is hard, the website testifies, through words and beautiful photos and videos, to Christians all over the globe who seek abundant life for their neighbours and the planet. As its impressive tagline announces, the World Council of Churches (WCC) throws itself daily into the task of “inspiring the worldwide fellowship of churches to work together for unity, justice and peace.” (*h t t p s : / / w w w . w c c o r g . c h*) ~~I am not alone in my admiration~~: the website gets 5,000 to 7,000 hits per day.¹

It takes a couple of clicks on the WCC’s “unity” tab to find one’s way from the homepage to a link called “Faith and Order Commission.” The communications people have done their best: there is a succinct definition of “faith and order,” a brief video featuring the commission in action, and links to digitized documents and resources the movement has produced over its ninety-five-year history. “Faith and Order,” as the website points out, is shorthand for ongoing work on the things that continue to divide the churches and prevent “full visible unity”: matters of belief and matters of order—how the churches organize their ministries for the sake of the gospel mission. Both relate to ecclesiology: the theology of being and acting as the Church of Jesus Christ. “Faith and Order” is the pursuit of theological dialogue, on the path to unity. It occurs in international forums, but also in national, regional, and local dialogues and commissions. It happens formally, and often informally, in local negotiations about ecumenical life together in our congregations and communities.

Despite these great aims and claims, many ecumenists agree: Faith and Order struggles for attention. Its work scarcely appeared at the WCC’s 10th Assembly, in Busan, South Korea, in 2013, despite the unveiling of a new convergence document, *The Church: Toward a*

¹ Website traffic information supplied by Marianne Ejdersten of WCC Communications office, Jan. 19, 2022.

² *The Church: Toward a Faith and Order Paper No. 214* *Visión* (Geneva: WCC, 2013). A “convergence” text in Faith and Order is one agreed upon by all the delegated representatives, across multiple faith

The agenda for the 11th Assembly, to take place in Karlsruhe, Germany in August-September 2022 is also short on Faith and Order topics and priorities. Admittedly, the title itself, “Faith and Order,” tends to evoke thoughts of “Law and Order,” of ecclesiastical police roaming the world to get churches to fall in line. However, even when people understand that “order” means not laws but structures and processes, reaction to the work is often wariness and weariness.

Indeed, why bother? Why devote time and talent to seeking not just inter-Christian cooperation but the deeper unity of the Church? That diffidence slips easily into United Church discussions, even among people who otherwise commit themselves to ecumenical collaboration. Might the quest for Christian unity not be simply the misguided goal of a hegemonic and outdated world view? Those are good questions. But rather than giving up on it, we need to reassert how and why Faith and Order is important to us—and here by “we” I mean particularly those of us who find a faith home in The United Church of Canada. I suggest Faith and Order is, for United Church folks, genetic, pragmatic, and transformative.

A. “Only through Union”: It’s Genetic

The term “Faith and Order” came to life in the person of Charles Brent, a Canadian born American Protestant Episcopal (i.e., Anglican) missionary bishop who attended the 1910 World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh, Scotland. The Conference’s focus on mission and evangelization largely ignored discussion of the churches’ divisions in doctrine and organization. Brent believed the churches needed to settle these matters before they could profess genuine unity. Upon returning from Edinburgh, he asked the Protestant Episcopal Church to convene a “world conference on Faith and Order.”³

Brent’s church embraced the request with enthusiasm (and with the funding of wealthy American donors) and began inviting the world into the process. Anglicans from all corners (including a few non-white Japanese, Chinese, African American, and south Asian representatives), Protestant, and Orthodox churches formed planning groups, called commissions, that reported to a “Joint Commission.”⁴ In 1919 Pope Pius

traditions. In the words of its Preface, “The convergence reached in *The Church* represents an extraordinary ecumenical achievement” (viii).

³ See Brent, Charles Henry, *Dictionary of the Ecumenical* (Eerdmans, 1991).

⁴ *World Conference Fræintche and Order: List of Appointed, De. Revised with additional appointments.*

X sent cordial greetings, but politely declined to attend, “as the teaching and practice of the Roman Catholic Church with regard to the visible unity of the Church of Christ was well known to everybody.”⁵ By 1922 the commissions listed over seven hundred members. When the World Conference finally came to order in Lausanne, Switzerland, in August 1927, chaired by Bishop Brent, among its approximately five hundred delegates were seven from the new United Church of Canada, including one of the Conference’s seven women delegates, H.S. (Mrs. William) Sanford.⁶

Planners of the World Conference set the questions that would set the Faith and Order agenda for years to come. What is the nature of the church? What do we mean by unity? Can we say we confess one faith? What can we do about sacraments and ministry?⁷ The framers of church union in Canada had settled these questions a decade prior, as they negotiated the Basis of Union. Sometimes, however, that aspect of the union narrative gets short shrift. We focus on the evangelizing and political mission: the rallying cry that this would be a church for the nation. Methodist General Superintendent C. Dwight Chown never hesitated to make clear “that this Canada of ours is God’s last opportunity of building up a Christian nation upon virgin soil, and we cannot allow little things to stand in the way of the best means for accomplishing this great purpose.”⁸ Yet, driven as it was by theo-political aspirations and other practical concerns, this union of Christians still needed to declare its common theological ground, and to develop a mutually acceptable structure. That is, this new United Church needed to clarify both its “faith” and its “order.”

The resulting Basis of Union supplied a common faith statement and a model of governance woven from those of the three uniting denominations. Sure, much of it seemed to come easily. Yet however lightly they may have held their denominational convictions, the church union negotiators nonetheless needed to seek consensus and find a way to stand together in the Gospel, while their denominational counterparts in other nations were still mulling over the idea. Canada’s church union

⁵ *Twenty Paragraphs about the World Conference* (1922), 7.

⁶ *Faith and Order: Proceedings of the World Conference* 3-21, (New York: G. H. Doran, 1927), 372-3.

⁷ See, for example, *Programme for the World Conference*, Lausanne, August 3-28, 1927, Switzerland.

⁸ Sermon reprinted in Edward Richard Schwarz, “Samuel Dwight Chown: An Architect of Canadian Church Union” (Boston University Graduate School, Ph.D. Dissertation, 1961), 219-221.

champions participated in the World Conference planning. Leaders of the Faith and Order movement focused on the need for Christians to be gathered into one believing community, one that would evangelize “by our union with one another, by the unanimity of our testimony,” as one speaker put it.⁹ United Church of Canada delegates to the Lausanne Conference were sought after as those who had found a pearl of great price. “Church Union in Canada had seemed to accomplish the impossible,” they reported to General Council in 1928.¹⁰

“Faith and Order” ecumenism, then, formed part of the United Church’s core identity, and I suggest that it continues, as genes do, to affect its life and identity. Did the church inherit the willingness to rethink and to assess its theology and its structures in part from the commitment of its forebears to wrestle through differences to a common solution? Do we assert ourselves ready to “draw the circle wide” (whether or not we actually do) because we inherited not only a pragmatic nature and delusions of colonizing grandeur, but also a yearning for the fuller unity that made us one?

Proposal CW02: “Initiating Dialogue on Church Union,” which is currently before General Council 44, asks the United Church to consider a revived effort to pursue organic church union with other mainline denominations in Canada through long-term, committed, multilateral dialogue. This proposal may startle people—who speaks of “organic union” anymore? But it would not surprise the early adopters of the Faith and Order movement. “[O]ur task is not to make unity, but to make it *ma n i .f. Æ*unity can be shown forth to the world only through union,” opined an Episcopalian bishop in 1912.¹¹ And the “united and uniting churches” said, “Amen.”

B. “The Time is Right”: It’s Pragmatic

Despite nearly a century of Faith and Order work, despite the arrival in the 1960s of the Roman Catholic Church at the dialogue table (having

⁹ Lefferd M.A. Haughwout, *The World Conference for Christian Unity: Questions to be Discussed at the World Conference on Faith and Order* (1934), 13.

¹⁰ World Conference on Faith and Order: Report of Commissioners from The United Church of Canada. United Church of Canada, *Proceedings of the General Council* 3, 1928, 402.

¹¹ C.P. Anderson, *Joint Commission Appointed to Confer with the Roman Catholic Church* (1912), 5-6.

discovered there was, after all, more to discuss about the unity of the church),¹² despite the bilateral dialogues that have blossomed around the world, including in Canada,¹³ and despite dialogue texts carefully crafted and generously presented to the churches, full visible unity “made manifest” eludes us. Christian denominations do not act together on almost every matter, as Faith and Order has repeatedly begged them to do.¹⁴ They still tend to hang their shingles across the road from one another and attempt to lure each other’s members over to taste a better brand of Christianity. Among those who notice ecumenical work at all, many declare faith and order ecumenism “old school” and irrelevant.¹⁵

And now I am asking you to believe not only that Faith and Order work is still meaningful for the United Church, but that it is “pragmatic,” of all things. I am a current member of the WCC Faith and Order Commission, and a past member of United Church bilateral national dialogues with the Anglican Church and the Roman Catholic Church. These experiences, with Christians of all traditions and many cultures on six continents, often living with complex life challenges, have taught me that faith and order work is rich with opportunity. We may not be “there” yet in terms of Christian unity made manifest, but we are somewhere much better than we were in 1927. These accomplishments, the fruits of ecumenical dialogue, offer us a way forward in a challenging global, and Canadian, landscape.

The challenge is not the lack of documents, of course. Those we

¹² At least ten percent of the members of the Commission on Faith and Order are Roman Catholic appointees of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (Bylaws of Faith and Order, as corrected 26 January 2015, Bylaw 4.11, footnote 2).

¹³ For information on Canadian bilateral dialogues and access to their documents see The Margaret O’Gara Ecumenical Dialogue Collection:
h t t p s : / / - d e i c a l m æ g r i ũ æ . a d a /

¹⁴ For example, the “Lund Principle”: “Should not our Churches ask themselves whether they are showing sufficient eagerness to enter into conversation with other Churches, and whether they should not act together in all matters except those in which deep differences of conviction compel them to act separately?” (“Word to the Churches,” from *R e p o r t o f t h e T h i r d W o r l d L u n d C o n f e r e n c e*, Sweden: August 15-28, 1952, 6).

¹⁵ Faith and Order Moderator Susan Durber describes being told that some of the attendees at a presentation she was to give “would be ‘old school Faith and Order type ecumenists’ and others would be . . . well a variety of things.” (Faith and Order Commission 2022. Moderator’s Report. March 2022).

have aplenty: long and short, comprehensive and pithy. Rather, the challenge is the failure of what ecumenists call “reception.” To be effective, dialogue texts need Christians to study, discuss, and accept the convergences their churches have reached. Even more, people must then alter their behaviour to reflect the new mutual understanding. By ignoring dialogue documents, Christians persist in their silos and their assumptions about the ecumenical “other.” Silos may be safe and dark, but the Gospel asks us for more: an evangel. Canadian churches cannot escape the precarity of their existence: ongoing decline in membership across all Christian churches (including Catholic and evangelical). Faith and Order texts are here to help. They tell us that we are already more united than divided. They point to ways we could, if we chose, unite our ministries, and so offer a more robust and coherent witness—locally and beyond. These texts also confront those real and thorny things that yet divide us, and they suggest incremental ways to keep working at them.

Tempted, but overwhelmed? Don’t know where to begin? You could start small, with the two-page *Statement of Mutual Commitment* of the Anglican and United Churches (2019).¹⁶ It reminds these two historic denominations how much we have in common, what difference our common witness can make, and what we can commit to do next. Or you could work with your local Catholics to offer the beautiful “Earth Hour Vigil” prepared in 2017 by the Roman Catholic-United Church Dialogue in Canada, part of their larger dialogue on climate change.¹⁷ Or you might take up the intriguing nineteen-page Faith and Order text, *What are the Churches?*¹⁸ with any in ecumenical colleague or two. These texts report on the careful and hard-won results of serious dialogue, but they also suggest where the churches might go next. They offer inspiration and hope. There is a way forward!

¹⁶ Appended to *Final Report of the Anglican-United Church of Canada Dialogue 2017-2020* available at <https://www.caonngtln.cta/nu.pclao/a> *Report of the UGC Dialogue* (not yet available on the UCC website).

¹⁷ Find the Earth Hour Vigil at <https://-deic.ulmæ.gu.æ.ada/a/r.u.c.c/-02117-wæ-E-Hv-Whi.gil>, and the dialogue report at <https://-deic.ulmæ.gu.æ.ada/?r=17>

¹⁸ *What are the Churches?* KSeayy i Fni gn dai bnogus *Proposals from the Responses to Visitation* and Order Paper No. 236. (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2021). Access at:

https://www.oikoumene.org/sites/06/What_Are_Churches_Saying_Web.

Look what we already say together about faith and practice. And look at the new ways we are engaging! In Faith and Order we are seeking connection with Christian churches around the world who are not yet at the dialogue table; we are offering a path through the bitter disputes around “moral discernment” that threaten relationships both within and among Christian denominations.¹⁹

“Any text that comes from the Faith and Order Commission comes with the hope that it will enable all the churches to live their life more fully,” says Faith and Order Moderator Susan Durber.²⁰ Is your church looking for fullness of life? The fruits of dialogue are ripe for the picking. “The time is right for the churches to challenge one another . . . to ask what more they can do to deepen and broaden their fellowship and to make more visible the communion that is a gift from God and the promise of hope for the world,” says Durber.²¹ The time is right: as Christians in Canada, are we willing to join with the ecumenical “other” to imagine pragmatic, hopeful ways, to pose and receive that challenge?

C. “It Asks not Less Faith, but More”: It’s Transformative

I experience a thrill whenever I sit for the first time at a new ecumenical dialogue table. It is an expectant moment; a new “dialogical community” is emerging. Like a newborn infant, this community needs patient nurturing to learn and grow. It will strive, sometimes mightily, to gain a few steps along the path to unity. There will be deep listening, frustration, more listening, epiphanies, endless wordsmithing, laughter, and prayer. Respect is both expected and earned. We delight in the “ecumenical gift exchange,” as ecumenists have come to call the sharing of faith across differences. Over the decades, ecumenists have learned how to dialogue in the way apprentices learn their trades: by practising it in the company of long-time ecumenists who learned it from their ecumenical elders. Splendid as it is, the way of dialogue is not often explained or examined.

Fortunately, more faith and order ecumenists are beginning to research it, and to suggest that this process, these dialogical communities, are a precious gift in a fractured world. Russell Johnson, an American Mennonite ecumenist, describes the dialogical community as one where

¹⁹ See text and webinar at: <http://www.oikomenia.org/laun-c-4-is-age-addoysu-ma-n-t-o-f-ocrh-u-r-t-h-e-s-e-n-g-i-gneo-r-dil-s-c-e-rWorks-on-broadening-the-table>” is still in process.

²⁰ Durber, Moderator’s Report, 2.

²¹ Ibid., par. 48.

there is “trust even in conflict.”²² As we commit to ecumenical dialogue, we learn, in the relative safety of the dialogue room, to build that trust. Kathryn Reinhard, an Episcopalian ecumenist, also studies the processes of dialogue, takes up the question of “intersubjective recognition.” In ecumenical dialogue, we enter into a process of recognizing the faith of the other and receiving the other’s recognition of us. A new “I” is formed in the process.²³

Understanding the power of what we are undertaking in ecumenical dialogue could be transformative if we dared to permit it. It offers tools for “disagreeing humanely and productively”²⁴ in both church and world, including in interfaith dialogue, which differs in its aims from Interchurch dialogue, but is increasingly a part of what it means to be “ecumenical.” Awareness of the processes of dialogue also attunes ecumenists to the ways they may need to decolonize and otherwise make their own dialogue tables truly welcoming spaces for dialogical community.

Entering into faith and order dialogue also transforms dialogue participants. In order to present the United Church faithfully in dialogue, I have needed to search and claim my tradition fully and honestly. More significantly, I have learned to listen before speaking, to empty myself of my denominational pride and self-righteousness, to be curious, to enter every ecumenical encounter with a truly open mind, to have confidence that something good will unfold. I know while I might lose a little of my hubris, I will not lose my self-respect, or my faithful principles; the Holy Spirit will not ask that of me. Pioneering Roman Catholic ecumenist Yves Congar, interrogating his own experience, noted that within ecumenical dialogue we undergo “the feeling that we are responding to a divine impulse in which we joyfully participate...It demands not less faith, but

²² Russell Johnson, “The Gospel in a Polarized Society” (paper presented to the North American Academy of Ecumenists [NAAE], November 18, 2021, viewed online). Publication forthcoming in the *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*

²³ Kathryn Reinhard, “Recognition and Ecumenical Interdependence: Relationship beyond Division” (paper presented to the NAAE, November 18, 2021, viewed online). Publication forthcoming in the *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*

²⁴ 2021 Conference Announcement on NAAE website:

<https://www.ecumenicsociety.org/news/2021-conference-announcement>

more.”²⁵ The new “I” created in ecumenical dialogue is collectively important and deeply personal. It is transformative.

Conclusion

Faith and Order. What’s it to you? I have suggested it is genetic, pragmatic, and transformative. Yes, I know we are tired, heavy-laden, perhaps not looking for ecumenical drama. However, if Philip could baptize a stranger in a puddle by the roadside (Acts 8:26-39), then what is to prevent any one of us from plunging into a text, a webinar, a time of prayer and reflection with an ecumenical other? “What could be more vital for any of us,” asks Susan Durber, “than discerning together how to account for our faith and how to live together as Christ’s body?”²⁶ May the Spirit breathe that vitality into our weary lives, our struggling churches, our fragile world.

²⁵ Yves Congar, “Ecumenical Experience and Conversion: A Personal Testimony,” 1963, in Robert C. Mackie and Charles C. West, eds., *The Sufficience of the Gospel* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963), 71-87. Reprinted in *The Ecumenical Movement: An Anthology*, 2nd Edition, Michael Kinnamon, ed. (Geneva: WCC, 2016), 24-25.

²⁶ Durber, Moderator’s Report.

DR. GEORGE CAMPBELL PIDGEON 1872 – 1971
FIRST MODERATOR OF THE UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA¹

By Frank P. Fidler



I came to Toronto from British Columbia to study theology at Emmanuel College in the autumn of 1931. That first year was particularly exciting for me as I set out to experience as many different worshipping groups as possible. I attended everything from the relatively unstructured Society of Friends to the Holy Blossom Synagogue under Rabbi Eisendrath as well as a full array of United and other “main line” churches.

By the autumn of 1932, I found myself usually alternating my attendance between the services conducted by Dr. Richard Roberts at Sherbourne Church and those at Bloor Street Church where Dr. George Pidgeon was minister. There were other “big names” among Toronto preachers in those days but these were the two whose messages and manners appealed most to me.

The following spring Dr. Pidgeon invited me to be his student assistant, responsible particularly for leadership in the field of religious education and youth work. It was an exciting challenge and not to be denied, the beginning of an experience and a relationship rich beyond my expectation, and an opportunity to learn the art of ministry from a master.

As a theology student I had resolved that I would not be an “assistant minister”, commonly regarded by many of us at Emmanuel as little more than “ecclesiastical bell hops”. But as this relationship was presented it looked like something quite different, and so it turned out to be.

From my beginning as “minister’s assistant” during my final year in theological college, the work at Bloor Street Church was an experience of partnership.

¹ This profile was originally published in *T o u c h N a t u m 3 e N u m b e r* 2.

I remember well the day in August when I presented myself at the church to begin my work. Dr. Pidgeon informed me that I would assist him in leading public worship in the Sunday services. He asked me to try on a suitable gown and said, “You will wear a clerical collar, of course”. That had not occurred to me and, though it was quite contrary to my expectations, there was no discussion; it was taken for granted. And I soon discovered that it made my introduction to the congregation much easier. It was typical of Dr. Pidgeon’s sense of the fitness of things. His respect for appropriate attire was in line with his careful preparation for every occasion, and his expectation that others would also be appropriately prepared whether in attire, mood or thought. He never led worship or took part in any meeting without having carefully prepared for it. This was particularly the case with his sermons.

Weekday mornings were regularly guarded carefully and devoted faithfully to study and preparation of his sermons, the services of the mid-week Bible study meetings, of his regularly syndicated articles on the International series of Sunday School lessons and various other presentations. It was no accident that his thoughtful and evocative sermons attracted many students from the University of Toronto nearby and from other schools, as well as their teachers, not to mention many leaders in business and professional life.

We students in Emmanuel College regarded him as a superb expository preacher. It was a great surprise for us to hear him describe himself as a topical preacher. The congregation that crowded Bloor Street Church every Sunday morning were obviously caught up in the reality of the worship he led and the intensity of the message he preached. His themes dealt with the real questions and concerns of life. It was a gripping experience to look out on the congregation that overflowed the pews filling even the steps in the gallery, and see their obvious absorption in his preaching, and in every part of the service.

Once he shared with a group of theological students what he described as the “psychological structure of a sermon”:

Begin with an illustration to show the relationship of your subject with the lives of the people. Then treat your text by its careful exposition and development and show its bearing on your subject. Conclude with a clear application to the lives of the people in your congregation.

He was a great teacher in all his preaching. The sermon series that he had conducted the previous year appeared in the regular mid-week services on Wednesday evenings. His preparation for preaching and teaching, the composition of his weekly Sunday School lesson articles based on the

outlines of the International Council of Religious Education, and his numerous other commitments grew out of those carefully guarded mornings spent in his study.

Although it was his preaching that first attracted people to the congregation of Bloor Street Church, it was also the quality of his personal contacts that drew so many to admire and trust him. He was always busy but never seemed so hurried that he could not find time to respond to a personal appeal or a group that sought his counsel. Bloor Street Church had broadcast its Sunday morning services since 1929. From his radio congregation came many requests for counsel and help to which he gave his attention. He lived in boarding houses in the neighbourhood around, whether or not they were related to the Church.

It was not only the members of the Bloor Street staff on whom he counted for leadership in the life of the congregation and the community. There was an impressive company of promising young men and women as well as experienced mature leaders whom he recognized and counted on to share the ministry of the congregation in its numerous fields of activity. Regular meetings of the staff discussed the needs of congregation and community and he encouraged each member to contribute his or her insight into the planning and decision-making. Although he usually summed up the process, others always felt that their contributions were respected and taken into account. He was unquestionably the leader of the congregation, but every person who shared in its planning and ministries felt like a valuable member of the team—a vital organ in this Body of Christ!

One never had occasion to forget that we were the church of Jesus Christ with the responsibility of carrying on His ministry. At the heart of our life was Dr. Pidgeon's own commitment and his sense of the evangelistic mission of the Church.

It was from his brother, Dr. Leslie Pidgeon, that I learned of the incident which illustrated for me the depth of Dr. Pidgeon's commitment to the Mission enterprise of the Church. It occurred in connection with his call, many years earlier, to become the minister in the Toronto Junction Presbyterian Church. The church had been built in a boom period, but the crash that followed shortly after in the early nineteen hundreds had meant financial disaster to many persons whose pledges had been given to contribute the funds for the structure. The congregation could not maintain the payments and there was the threat that the building would be sold. In calling Dr. Pidgeon they hoped that he could help them redeem the situation. At the first meeting of the Official Board it was pointed out that there was no provision for gifts from the congregation to the "Schemes of the Church", as the Presbyterian connectional funds were called. The

people protested that they could not even discharge their own debts on the church. Dr. Pidgeon replied, "You called me here to help. The only basis on which we can maintain a living Church is by widening the interest and participation of the congregation in the whole life of the Church. If we allow the interest of the congregation to turn inward it will stifle itself". The people agreed to accept that principle. They voted to provide a substantial sum for the "Schemes of the Church". In their renewed spirit they also met their debts. When Dr. Pidgeon left the congregation to become a professor in Westminster College, Vancouver, six years later the congregation at Toronto Junction seemed securely established in the community and a lively part of the whole enterprise of the Presbyterian Church.

When he later came to Bloor Street Church that congregation had long been greatly interested in the world-wide mission of the church and had personally supported Dr. James Menzies in Honan, China. When bandits took Dr. Menzies' life in 1920, Dr. Pidgeon encouraged Dr. Bob McClure to succeed him in China and proceeded to involve the whole congregation in his support. The offerings of the Sunday School and Junior Congregation were completely devoted to the McClure Fund. Groups and individuals wrote to him and sent gifts that, at least to them, represented active sharing in his work. McClure's reports to the congregation on his occasional visits home were highlights. Even though he was half-way around the world, Bob McClure was a member of the Bloor Street Session and Dr. Pidgeon frequently quoted from his correspondence in his sermons. Not only this very personal sense of participation in the world mission of the Church but support of the Home and Foreign Mission funds of the church were very close to Dr. Pidgeon's heart and an outstanding characteristic of the congregation to which he ministered. For one period during the Depression the congregation undertook the support of all the Home Missionaries of Cochrane Presbytery

Fairly early in his ministry Dr. Pidgeon had been named the national chairman of the Presbyterian Board of Moral and Social Reform and later became president of the Christian Social Council of British Columbia. It was his evangelical conviction that the whole of life belonged to God that had led to his involvement in these activities and there was never any doubt about his concern for those whose lives were damaged or destroyed by personal abuse or social or economic handicaps. His deep conviction that privilege inevitably carries with it corresponding responsibility was not merely a formula to preach to others. It was the practical application of his sense that faith in Christ must be demonstrated in the real affairs of daily living, not merely professed verbally.

As a person born and educated in Western Canada, and moreover a former Methodist, I had not been conscious of the bitterness and conflict that had split families and churches in the former Presbyterian connections in the East. But in the 1930's one still heard stories about the bitterness that had been stirred up over different attitudes towards the appropriateness of church union and the settlement of property and other matters following Union.

As early as 1883 there had been in the Presbyterian Church strong advocates of union with the Methodist Church and by 1904 formal discussions looking towards union were begun by these two Church bodies together with Congregationalists. Although he had not been engaged in the early negotiations, Dr. Pidgeon was present and supported the action of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in 1916 when it voted by a majority of 406 to 90 to unite, a majority of the presbyteries having already approved of this action. It was not that he was a late convert to the idea of the formation of an all-Canada protestant church. As early as his ministry in Streetsville (1898 – 1903) he had preached a sermon on “The Unity of Believers”, based on the text of Jesus’ great prayer in John 17:21, “That they all may be one”, and his notations appended to the manuscript indicated that he had repeated this sermon at least four times in the four years in various other places.

In 1917 he became convener of the Presbyterian Church’s Board of Home Missions and in the same year he also became a member of the Presbyterian Assembly’s Committee on Church Union and of its Executive. Within four years he was recognized as the official leader of the union movement throughout the Presbyterian Church.

By this time there had also arisen strong opponents of Union in the Presbyterian Church. Dr. Pidgeon felt that the actions of the Presbyteries and the General Assembly of 1916 constituted a commitment of the church to union and that to waver in their resolution would constitute a betrayal of principle. He was a firm believer in the Presbyterian practice of orderly arrival at a decision in church courts, following full and frank discussion, and then acceptance and application by the whole church of the majority decision. To go back on the decisions of 1916 would be to deny their own commitment.

Moreover there were already in small communities of northern Ontario and western Canada many places where local Presbyterians, Methodists and Congregationalists had already joined to form united congregations. Around the turn of the century when there had been rapid expansion of the population in those areas it had been impossible to provide enough ministerial leadership from Canadian sources and many

ministers had been recruited from the Old Country to supply the missions of all three of these Churches. The war of 1914-18 had intervened and this overseas source of men had dried up. By 1922 there were over 1,000 united pastoral charges which included some 3,000 worshipping units in western Canada and northern Ontario. They had convened their own General Council and formed 3 presbyteries of Union Churches.

There was great impatience on the part of Union Churches that the Presbyterian, Methodist and Congregationalist Church Union be hastily consummated. Meantime the anti-Union leaders in the Presbyterian Church were becoming stronger in their opposition. Dr. Pidgeon found himself identified as the target of their resistance.

Alternatives to organic union were proposed. Some opponents of union advocated a federation of the Churches that would enable them to retain their historically different structure yet co-operate in missions and other activities more fully. There were also suggestions from various sources that there might be fruitful discussions of union with the Anglican Church. Dr. Pidgeon refused to be diverted from the main issue which he felt had been committed to him by the Assembly of the Presbyterian Church. John Grant, in his biography of Dr. Pidgeon, has summed up his position: "For George Pidgeon the issue was simple: Presbyterianism could maintain its honour and its national stature only by fulfilling its commitment to union".

There were times during the last few years before the consummation of Union when the controversy in the Presbyterian Church was so bitter that it seemed that the union plan might indeed collapse. Dr. Pidgeon's firmness perhaps saved the cause. It certainly steadied those who might have faltered, and it earned the respect of the leaders of the Union movement among the Methodist and Congregational leaders.

The last General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church was convened early in June 1925. Dr. Pidgeon was elected Moderator. On June 10th, the United Church of Canada came into being. Over seventy percent of Presbyterians came into the Union though many congregations especially in Ontario, were severely split.

The consummation of the Union in the Mutual Street arena in Toronto on June 10, 1925, was a moving event that publicly demonstrated the respect and trust which all parties held for Dr. Pidgeon's integrity and strength. The Rev. Dr. S. D. Chown, the Superintendent, and veteran servant of the Methodist Church, had been expected by many to be elected the first Moderator of the new United Church. However, he rose before the nominations were opened and announced his decision not to stand for the office. He asked that he might have the honour to nominate Dr. Pidgeon

and that the Secretary of the General Council be instructed to cast his (Chown's) ballot for Pidgeon's election. There was a pause in the gathering until the full significance of the request was grasped; "then a tremendous wave of applause swept through the building", reported the press. The Rev. Dr. W.H. Warriner, a Congregationalist from Montreal, and Chairman of the gathering rose and asked that all in favour show their approval by a rising voted. "As one man, every delegate in the house (350) rose". It was a victory for Chown as well as for Pidgeon.

As John Grant comments in his biography of Dr. Pidgeon, "Of all the assets that he brought to the leadership of the unionist cause, the greatest were qualities of character. Even in the bitterest days of controversy, few suspected his motives or doubted his integrity. And even beyond integrity he showed forth a quality of sanctity that disarmed criticism . . . The church union movement gained from the leadership of a man of prayer who meditated on the Bible, preached it and lived it."

FROM THE HEART

PERSONAL EXPERIENCES OF ECUMENISM

By Lois M. Wilson

I first experienced “ecumenism” as a child, when my family spent its month long holiday in a freight canoe on Lake Superior (and later, Lake of the Woods) paddling from campsite to campsite, learning how to “read the weather and the stars,” eating berries and freshly caught fish, respecting the environment by leaving clean campsites, learning the many usages of spruce and birch trees, learning the names of flowers, plants and insects, and acknowledging partnership and balance with the natural world. Every year for the rest of my life I have spent some of the summer in a canoe and camping. I have come to love the water, the wind, the trees, the rocks, the flowers, the animals, and to look upon the silences, solitude and spaciousness as essential to my spirituality and to living respectfully on the earth and with all creation. This posture was activated strongly in 1989 when the Government appointed me a member of the Nuclear Fuel Waste Management and Disposal Concept Environmental Assessment Panel. I had strongly objected to the proposal to bury toxic nuclear fuel waste that will be toxic for thousands of years, in so called remote areas of Canada, such as near the small village of Ignace, Ontario. An accident or leakage would poison the earth and waterways for generations to come. And because of my commitment to live in partnership with the earth, it becomes ever more urgent to work to preserve the earth, threatened by climate change created by human beings.

Does it surprise you that I identify this experience as “ecumenical?” The Greek word *oikos* means household or family, and from it English derives the words “ecology,” “economy” and “ecumenism” for “the whole inhabited world.” I write about my ecumenical experiences in those three areas.

My stance concerning “economy” is rooted in my early Winnipeg days, nurtured by my minister father, and living in the anti-establishment “north end” of the city where I was influenced by Member of Parliament Stanley Knowles of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF), and the historical memory of Rev. J.S. Woodsworth, who, in the midst of the bitter Winnipeg strike of 1919 by workers for a living wage, was arrested for quoting Isaiah 58: 6-7:

Is this not what I require of you as a fast? To loose the fetters of
injustice,
To untie the knots of the yoke and set free those who have been
crushed?
Is it not sharing your food with the hungry, taking the homeless
poor into your house,
Clothing the naked when you meet them,
And never evading a duty to your kinfolk?

This may explain why I am currently giving so much time and effort to animate United Church members across the country to lobby for a Guaranteed Liveable Income for those below the poverty line in Canada—proposed by Senator Croll in 1972, endorsed that same year by the UCC's General Council, but never implemented by the Canadian government. We are reaching out to sister denominations as well as secular partners, in keeping with my understanding that ecumenism means “the whole inhabited world,” including non believers.

It was not always so for me.

Initially, I understood “ecumenism” as inter-denominational cooperation, and it certainly IS that. So when our church building burned to the ground in Hamilton in 1969, we joined the small Anglican congregation across the street. I became very good at leading the Anglican liturgy! This was prior to the ordination of women in the Anglican communion, so it was no surprise when an older woman, kneeling for the Eucharist at the altar rail and seeing me offering the elements, said to me, “I’ll have mine from the OTHER minister.” To which I responded by whispering to my Anglican colleague, “That woman needs counselling.”

But before I was ordained, I wondered why the church did so little to honour the witness of laity. Apparently it was enough to urge people to brighten the corner where you were!! I happened across an article in Time magazine outlining an experiment in laity engagement by the Lutherans in Duluth, Minnesota, so I took off for Duluth one Thanksgiving weekend. They had developed an initiative that suggested answers to two questions that had been asked by the Lutherans in Germany after World War II, unaware of the destruction by Nazis in their neighbourhood: “What is going on in my community?” And “what can I do about it?” I adapted the American model, inviting citizens of an entire city to focus on those two questions during a blitz month, bringing all available resources to the city wide *Town Talk*. We used TV, radio, newspapers, sermons, school essays, booklets on the issues distributed in shopping centers, regular Board

meetings of all organizations etc., etc. in an interactive way, and were astonished when so many citizens demonstrated a “care for the city.” I was learning that “ecumenism” meant EVERYONE—“the whole inhabited world.” It was inseparable from the needs of people, from public policy, from religious and political ideological divides.

Having been invited to a World Council of Churches conference on laity in Crete to share *Town Talk* I interacted with members of denominations VERY different from mine, as well as laity from South Africa under apartheid. I experienced Greek Orthodox Easter liturgies for the first time, and realized the Orthodox make up one third of Christendom! For me, it was a virtual Pentecost. Never again only one denomination, and never again confined to churchly matters. God’s concern was for people in the whole inhabited world. Crete had set my agenda for my public Christian ministry for the next dozen years, as President of both the Canadian and World Council of Churches, and as Moderator of The United Church of Canada.

A three month visit to India, offered by a Mar Thoma priest I had met in Crete, sealed my commitment to public ministry and to inter-faith dialogue. One simply HAD to engage in public ministry in India in view of the obvious poverty. It was the first time I experienced, as a Christian, being a minority in a sea of Muslims and Hindus. Upon return to Hamilton, I organized a series of inter-faith exchanges, which led me to join the Hamilton Inter-Racial Committee to combat racism. Later, I organized an inter faith group of women, who, instead of using the male model of giving speeches about one’s faith from behind a podium, decided to share how our faith had hindered or helped us in understanding women’s bodily functions: puberty, menstruation, intercourse, pregnancy, delivery, lactation, menopause. No one ever missed a meeting!!

Invited by the World Council of Churches to be part of a four person ecumenical team to express support for victims of a massacre of South Korean youth in their struggle for democracy in the nineties, I found myself the only woman in the delegation. Despite the country being under martial law forbidding travel, I was invited by two Korean Christian women to visit survivors in the city of Kwangju, the site of the massacre. That visit changed my life priorities. And after visits to desperate victims of state oppression in Chile, Argentina, and South Africa that same year as Moderator, I realized the defence of human rights needed to be top of the churches’ agenda worldwide, as well as in Canada which has such a poor record with the Indigenous people and with gays and lesbians.

This very public ministry led to my participation in citizen-led initiatives, such as a panel at the weekend gathering in Alberta on the

nuclear arms race, and opposition to the use of cruise missiles by Canada during the eighties.

It also led to my appointment by the Canadian government to a number of boards, delegations, and committees: The Refugee Status Advisory Board; a Government-Church delegation to Sri Lanka and its human rights record; the Human Rights and Democracy Institute, of which I was the Chair; the board of the Canadian Institute for Peace and Security; the Monitoring Group to El Salvador and Guatemala; and finally as an Independent Senator, where I led a delegation to North Korea which established diplomatic relations in 2001. I was Canada's Special Envoy to the Sudan for several years.

Much of this happened because my minister husband and I decided early on, that instead of the usual designation of Preaching Minister and Youth Minister, he would do the In House Ministry, and I would do the Out House Ministry. I am also persuaded that the Holy Spirit was very active, because it was ALWAYS the call of a particular community that launched me into public ministry and ecumenism, to which I learned to respond. And for which I am eternally thankful.

THE ONGOING VALUE OF ECUMENICAL PARTNERSHIPS

Jim Hodgson

In 1991, I assisted a team from Vision TV (Canada's multi-faith network in those days) in producing a documentary about the justice and peace work of the national ecumenical coalitions. Among the people we interviewed was Georges Erasmus, then the national Chief of the Assembly of First Nations.

I had first heard of Erasmus when he was leader of the Dene Nation in the Northwest Territories. One of my first ecumenical engagements as a teenager involved solidarity with the Dene in their struggle against a proposal to build an oil pipeline in the Dehcho (Mackenzie River) valley in the mid-1970s.

The Vision interviewer, Rita Deverell, asked Erasmus about the relationships that led to the creation of the inter-church coalition called Project North, and its eventual successor, the Aboriginal Rights Coalition. Erasmus responded by saying his people had a hunch that church people who were committed to ecumenism and to the reforms of Vatican II would be sympathetic to the justice issues raised by the Dene. Their hunch proved correct. Indigenous peoples continue their ecumenical work today in

KAIROS, alongside the coalition's other work for ecological, migrant and gender justice. Erasmus saw the connection between "opening the windows" of the church (Pope John XXIII's phrase) and embracing justice issues.

In those years (early 1990s), I was working with the Canadian Council of Churches (CCC) as its ecumenical education and communication secretary. I came to that role from a background in journalism practised in secular and ecumenical settings in Canada and Latin America. After leaving the CCC in 1994, I worked for six years in Mexico in an ecumenical development education centre and then joined the global partnership staff of The United Church of Canada as its Latin America/Caribbean program coordinator.

Even before I had fashioned a sort of career at the intersections of journalism, religion and Latin America, my sense of ecumenism was being shaped through encounters like the ones I had at the first Canadian Christian Festival, held in Ottawa in 1982. Élisabeth Jeannine Lacelle, a theology professor over the years at several Ottawa universities, was among the speakers. She left us with this question: "Of what use is your ecumenism if it ignores women?" The point was reinforced by the strong presence in the festival of Lois Wilson, the United Church's Moderator at the time, and U.S. theologian Rosemary Radford Reuther. My reflection soon broadened to embrace questions that challenge other divisions, such as those of class, race, sexual orientation, gender identity, and religion.

Throughout these decades, I saw myself as becoming a lot like my old CCC job title: I am an ecumenical educator and communicator. I was blessed to receive countless unexpected gifts: insights received by being open to the Spirit of God in the voices of those who would take me by the hand to show me how they live in a barrio, on the street, on a reserve, or in any centre of learning. Knowing that others more skilled than I would advance official ecumenical dialogue toward Christian unity—and they do, with all the work that led to and followed the 1999 Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification as but one high-profile example—I concentrated on an agenda more like that set forth in *M e n d i n g l , d h e* the United Church's 1997 vision for healing, reconciliation and "whole-world ecumenism" (embracing inter-faith relations): Where does creation need mending today? What can we do together today? And then I told the stories of such collaboration whenever I could.

In many of the countries that I visit most often, crime is a serious problem. Everywhere I go, I hear horror stories about the impact of drug-trafficking and the war on drugs. El Salvador, Honduras, Jamaica, Guatemala and Colombia jostle with each other for the top spot in annual

registries of murders. Mexico now has 400,000 people who are internally-displaced because of drug violence.

In Guyana in February 2008, I attended a meeting of churches from throughout the Caribbean and North America. We were talking about a call made by the World Alliance [now Communion] of Reformed Churches, in the Accra Confession (2004), to make “covenants for justice.” In the preceding weeks, the people of Guyana had been shocked by two mass murders. One in late January took the lives of 11 people, including five children. Then 10 more were killed in a riverside mining town. The first day of our meeting took place on a national day of mourning.

In an evening session of small-group conversation, a half-dozen of us gathered around a table to talk about what it would mean to make covenants amongst our churches to work for justice. Several of us had talked out of the top ends of our bureaucratic heads and shared our economic justice resolutions. Suddenly, a young Guyanese pastor broke through our abstractions, and cried: “We need covenants for justice! We need liberation theology!”

Gradually, through tears as we all held each other’s hands, he told his story. In Guyana as in many countries, most pastors must supplement their income by holding other jobs. Years earlier, the young pastor had been trained as a rural policeman and eventually found work in the international airport, a place where he had continued to work while completing theological studies and serving in congregations in the heart of Georgetown. But in the airport, he encountered the corruption and threats that are now commonplace in the countries that are transit points as illegal drugs move to markets in the northern countries. Through the church, he sought but did not find the institutional will and strength to speak truth to power in Guyana, even though, as he pointed out, the Parliament and Supreme Court are virtually adjacent to the church in the centre of the capital city. “It must mean that at some point we were as important as they are, or we wouldn’t be there. What happened?” He then said: “We need covenants for justice with you so that we can talk to the powerful about what is happening with our people.”

With that statement, he underscored a major reason why churches seek each other out to work in partnership. Our voices are stronger when we speak together, when we overcome our differences and raise our voices in solidarity with those who suffer.

At some point in our conversation Dale Bisnauth—one of the elders of the church in Guyana and chronicler of the ecumenical movement in the Caribbean—joined our group. To seek justice is the social way, he said, the collective way, that we have of showing our love of neighbour.

More recently, I came across a reflection by Marcelo Barros, a Benedictine monk from north-east Brazil whom I have met a few times in the World Social Forum and ecumenical gatherings. “For Jesus, the important question is not who is my neighbour, but rather: I am the neighbour to whom? For Jesus, the neighbour is the one in whose path I find myself.”

In the same text, Barros recalled a phrase from Vatican II’s Decree on Ecumenism (*U n i t a t i s* *R* *pr* *o* *n* *u* *n* *g* *a* *t* *e* *d* *e* *i* *g* *1* *9* *6* *4* *t* “Jesus positioned himself according to a principle that Vatican II called the ‘hierarchical order of revealed truths’” (UR 11). The Council’s point was not to create a “false irenicism”—extreme relativism for the sake of apparent peace—but to inspire deeper understanding of “the unfathomable riches of Christ” (Eph. 3:8). On the 25th anniversary in 2020 of Pope John Paul II’s encyclical on Christian unity, Pope Francis struck a similar note, writing: “One thing is certain. Unity is not chiefly the result of our activity, but a gift of the Holy Spirit. Yet, unity will not come about as a miracle at the very end. Rather, unity comes about in journeying; the Holy Spirit does this on the journey.”

And so we walk with each other, encountering each other’s unexpected gifts in love and humility, recognizing that others too labour to overcome the patriarchy that is embedded in religious and family authority systems, and to overcome misuse of biblical phrases that sustain hatred and exclusion.

Walking together, it seems to me, is more necessary than ever in a time when religious affiliation in Canada has dropped below 70 per cent (as reported in a recent Angus Reid survey). Even among those who describe themselves as Roman Catholic or mainstream Protestant, more than half report that they are “spiritually uncertain.” We need to keep opening windows and breaking down walls, not so much anymore to let others in, but so that we can get out and walk with others more. Perhaps in the telling of our stories, in active reflection on our work, the churches and the ecumenical movement might also be renewed.

The way of Jesus is the way of love.

MY ECUMENICAL JOURNEY

By Noel Suministrado

I truly find it difficult to pinpoint where my ecumenical journey began. But first, some context: the Philippines, the country where I came from is a lush green country in Asia composed of more than 7,000 islands. Blessed

with abundant natural resources, they are situated south of Hong Kong and Japan, and home to more than 100 million Filipinos.

The Spanish colonial period of the Philippines began when explorer Ferdinand Magellan claimed the islands in 1521 for the Spanish Empire, bringing the Roman Catholic faith. The period lasted until the Philippine Revolution in 1898. The U.S. then fought Spain during the Spanish-American war, and took possession of the Philippines, prompting the Philippine-American war of 1899 to 1902. American colonial rule brought the Protestant form of Christianity to the islands. In 1946 the Philippines achieved their independence.

This young democracy was governed by a series of presidents and political parties, interspersed with clannish politics and regionalism. Revolutionary movements and insurgency resulted in the declaration of Martial Law in 1972 by President Ferdinand Marcos. The martial rule plunged the Philippines into its darkest moments: thousands were arrested, tortured, and killed, and thousands simply disappeared. Marcos' family and his cronies enriched themselves using taxpayers' money, resulting in grinding poverty for the people; the economic hardship of the dictatorship brought the Filipino people to their knees. In the face of these sufferings, the churches and the people responded to these issues of social justice with dissent and resistance. Ferdinand Marcos Sr. and his family were eventually ousted from Malacañang in 1986.

I was a young pastor of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP) during that time. I happened to participate in one of the National Council of Churches in the Philippines' (NCCP) seminars on human rights. Together with delegates from other Christian churches, I had a new experience, interacting with people of different denominations. Because Protestants are a minority in the Philippines (about 2%) it was an experience to be able to mingle and talk with Roman Catholic priests and lay people. I was expecting that our doctrinal differences would be a hindrance, but the societal ills plaguing our country—human rights, poverty, and economic disparity—made us see these issues as commonalities and bound us to a common cause.

It was a turning point in my faith understanding: ecumenism can be a way to live out the call of Christ. I realized that it was a *ca*, and it dawned on me that despite our doctrinal differences and ecclesial structures and dynamics, we shared a vision of a more just and humane society. The future dialogues, meetings, and seminars fueled us and transformed us into taking action: attending rallies, sit-ins, demonstrations, and writing petition letters. They were all ecumenical in nature!

My ecumenical journey took another turn when I went to Bossey

Ecumenical Institute in Geneva and attended the Graduate Semester in 1998. Dubbed the “ecumenical laboratory of the world”, participants in Bossey live, study, and work together for six months, affording them a deep ecumenical experience. It was there I experienced the clash of cultures, values, ideas, and faith perspectives. I shared in the class my own biases, prejudices, and convictions borne out of my Philippine experience, and they were tested alongside the experiences of others from different countries. This was an eye-opener for it led me to understand the bigger realities of the ecumenical world. Here, living, studying, and interacting with people of different cultures and faith, one realizes that ecumenism is indeed wider and more far-reaching than my limited view! For me, that program of lived ecumenism has changed the “other” into a person with a name. I discovered that my ecumenical issues are inextricably linked to the ecumenical issues of my classmates from the other side of the globe. We were pushed to shed our presumptions and preconceptions. Though sometimes it was painful and difficult at times, our views were enriched and sharpened by each other. I gained new friends and fellow pilgrims in the ecumenical journey. Two years later I went back for the Master of Ecumenical Studies program of Bossey and University of Geneva, furthering and widening my ecumenical perspective. It was such a rich and fulfilling experience.

After Geneva, I was more than inspired to continue the ecumenical agenda of the UCCP, involving myself with environmental issues—mining, deforestation, and the wanton destruction of natural resources. We opposed the proposed construction of a six-lane highway by the Philippine government which would have cut through our beloved volcanic mountain. Again, through people movements and initiatives, rallies, demonstrations, and petitions, we wrangled with government officials, and our ecumenical group KAAKBAY, composed of Roman Catholic priests, Protestant ministers, Indigenous leaders, and concerned citizens, was able to persuade the government to stop the implementation of the project. There were moments of danger and intimidation, as the Philippines government is well-known for harassing and dispatching those who oppose these projects. But this emboldened the people, because they saw that their future depended on the environment that sustained their lives and communities. Ecumenism became a “lived” experience.

Looking back, I see now that this “lived ecumenism,” this experiential type of ecumenism, is needed and essential. I also noted that personal relationships and friendships are developed and they help us to understand each other despite different religious and ecclesial perspectives.

At present, I am part of the Mutual Recognition of Ministry Personnel Committee between the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP) and The United Church of Canada (UCC). I am glad to be part of the UCC-Roman Catholic Dialogue, and I see a challenge that faces The United Church of Canada, in terms of its ecumenical thrust. This led me to be part of the Commission of Faith and Witness of the Canadian Council of Churches for three years, and I am still with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)–Roman Catholic Dialogue. These involvements of bilateral talks and dialogues I find immensely rewarding as they align with my previous ecumenical encounters.

The demographics of Canada are changing, especially brought about by the influx of migrants from around the world, and these pose ecumenical challenges and possibilities. What would *d i a s p e a r i u m* terms of ecumenical ministry? What would it mean for our traditional churches that are folding up or having to do shared ministries with other churches? What about the Indigenous concerns and issues in relation to an ecumenical perspective? It could be that those of us in the UCC should seriously consider re-visiting our ecumenical roots to rediscover perspective, lest we forget that The United Church of Canada is a product of that ecumenical undertaking of 1925.

Lastly, the more contemporary issues brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic—climate change, fundamentalisms, and the global conflicts—all change the religious landscape of the world and add greater challenge to the very core and meaning of *o i k u m e n o l o g i e* that as the world gets more globalized and complex, local experiences have bearings on the global, and have a place in the discourse of ecumenical endeavour.

Looking back, I realize that my journey is far from over; it is possible that one could get “ecumenical overdose” from the seemingly repeated dialogues and ecumenical projects, and conclude that they are by no means important, essential, and needed. But I believe that “lived ecumenism” is an important principle to be added to discussion.

I am always inspired by the German ecumenist Ernst Lange who said about ecumenism: “And yet it moves...” Surely this declaration is as bright as the Manitoba sunlight in the Prairies!

God Will Be All In All: Theology through the Lens of Incarnation.**Anna Case-Winters. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2021. x + 220 Pp.**

Anna Case-Winters is Professor of Theology at McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago. Her accessibly written book provides a welcome update on Christology from a process theology perspective. Her starting point is the Chalcedonian Definition of Jesus as fully human and fully divine. She argues that mapping this affirmation onto a process cosmology overcomes conceptual difficulties that have burdened it. In a process perspective, the incarnation is not so much a new incursion of God into history, but rather the revelation through Jesus Christ of how God is already present and at work everywhere. The incarnation happens through Jesus' response to God's Spirit, or in process terminology, the divine initial aims. So responsive was Jesus to God's Spirit that he became the definitive revelation of God.

Chapter two reverses the direction of inquiry and asks what Jesus, as the incarnate Word, reveals God to be like. This turns out to be the familiar process conception of God as internally related to all creation, yet transcendent to it through the infinite nature of God's love. God stands in solidarity with all creation and resists sin and evil through continually luring creation towards a higher good. Jesus emerges as the great moral exemplar who reveals what it means to love God and neighbour and care for creation. Chapter three asks what light the understanding Jesus as fully human sheds on the human condition. The answer is that human beings are embodied and embedded in creation. In stressing embodiment, Case-Winters seeks to overcome any mind-body dualism that sees bodies as something we have rather than something we are. In stressing that people are embedded in creation, she seeks to overcome the notion that material reality only provides objects at our disposal. As embodied beings who are embedded in material reality, we are related to the natural world. Our welfare is bound up with that of the natural environment. It has a value above and beyond our use of it.

The incarnation is an invitation to see God as present in all things and all of creation as existing within God. Chapter four argues that this gives rise to an ethical stance of advocacy and action. Case-Winters uses the term co-creators to describe the vocation of humanity to seek justice, peace and care for creation. She explores this in relation to issues of disability and race. The differently abled bear the image of God as much

as anyone else and are to be respected accordingly. Respect for bodies, regardless of racial differences, requires that racist social structures and practices be dismantled.

Chapter five turns to the cross, which reveals God's presence and solidarity with people in their suffering. The cross is not something God required in order to forgive sin, but rather something that God in Jesus underwent out of love for humanity and creation. She endorses Jesus' resurrection as an eschatological event that impinged upon history, vindicating Jesus and calling the church into being with its message of radical hope. Together, Jesus' cross and resurrection reveal God to be present with creation in its suffering and resistant to it.

Chapter six examines how the affirmation of the incarnation relates to other religions, to the environmental crisis, and to the question of life on other planets. She endorses the "Franciscan innovation," the idea that Christ did not come in response to sin but was coming anyway, to gather a community of creatures who join together in praising and celebrating God's goodness and love. She extends the intention behind this to the whole cosmos as she ponders the possible relationship of Jesus to life in other galaxies.

Finally, she addresses the question of theodicy. God understood in light of Jesus Christ and from a process perspective provides an ultimate hope of good overcoming evil, she argues, but not a guarantee. What we have in Jesus is an assurance that God's infinite love is ceaselessly at work in every moment, seeking to bring good out of evil and to transform creation towards an ever greater goodness and life.

This welcome contribution to Christology will be useful for theologians, clergy and educated lay-people looking for a thoughtful consideration of how Jesus Christ can be understood in the American and Canadian contexts.

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Christian Understandings of Christ: the Historical Trajectory

David H. Jensen. Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2019. Pp. ix + 340.

One of my fondest memories from my first year in ministry happened during children’s time. I was describing Jesus’ parable of the lost sheep. Half-way through what I thought to be a masterful exposition, an eight year-old girl who was brand new to church asked, “who’s Jesus?” This was good material for a congregational laugh, but it also served as its own parable for our Secular Age. As Christendom continues to fade in North America and Europe, we can not even assume that people will know who Jesus is, let alone why he matters.

Enter David H. Jensen, academic dean and professor in the Clarence N. and Betty B. Frierson Distinguished Chair of Reformed Theology Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary. Jensen’s task in *C h r i s t i a n U n d e r* is to answer the question, “who is Jesus?” for the church in our time. He takes up this task by offering a survey of Christology and soteriology from the New Testament through to the “twentieth century and beyond” [259], with many stops between.

The way Jensen structures his survey is somewhat unique. While the book is divided into broad chronological sections like “Patristic Portrayals of Jesus” [47] and “Christologies of Enlightenment and Renewal” [207], he focuses on the work of influential, individual theologians. While he could be in danger of reading theology through the one-dimensional “great man” theory of history, Jensen puts each theologian in their broader context and relates their Christological reflection to their historical moment.

At the same time, Jensen is not content to leave Augustine, Theresa of Avila, or Adolf Von Harnack in the past. Rather, he exegetes each individual’s theology and offers his own positive and critical assessments as to their influence and contemporary importance. His section on the theology of John Calvin, for example (179), was particularly engaging. Many contemporary mainline or liberal interpreters write off Calvin as a dour figure who is primarily to blame for the “dread decree” of double-predestination. In Jensen’s hands, however, Calvin’s Christology working from the traditional categories of priest, prophet and king, encourage “political involvement, so that civil government might more nearly reflect God’s intent for humanity” (182). Churches who hold to H. Richard Niebhur’s model of “Christ transforming culture” are surely in Calvin’s debt. This is only one example of many, where Jensen not only relates a figure historically, but unpacks for us their ongoing relevance. His

hermeneutic of charity towards those in the past is truly refreshing in a field that can sometimes lean too heavily on abstraction, deconstruction and the hermeneutics of suspicion. Charity, along with the accessibility of his writing, is Jenson's theological strong suit.

Jenson's project is by and large successful. However, one minor criticism one might level is where his "trajectory" of Christology inevitably leads. While Rosemary Radford Ruether, Sallie McFague, and Catherine Keller are indeed "big names" in theology, their impact is negligible outside the circles of Progressive Christianity. The decline of Christendom in the West has been accompanied by a waning in the influence of the liberal, mainline denominations that once set the world's theological agenda. "To interpret Jesus rightly," Jenson writes, "we need to look to cultures other than our own" (337). There is little in here that reflects the evangelical and charismatic forms of Christianity now dominant among the diverse peoples of the two-thirds world. While his inclusion of the Ghanaian theologian Mercy Amba Oduyoye (305) gestures towards this new reality, one might get the impression that Jenson believes that all Christological roads still inevitably lead to Claremont School of Theology, so to speak. As important as these theologians might be to our own branches of Jesus' vine, they are hardly representative of the contemporary vineyard.

This small criticism aside, I would recommend *Christian Under* *standing* for seminarians as well as educated lay-persons looking for an engaging overview of Christology through the ages that is clear as to the timeless relevance of our theological forbearers. As a pastor I found it helpful as a refresher course, one where Jenson helps us discover that "the interpretation of Jesus ought to lead to renewed life, wherever we find ourselves on this increasingly imperiled planet that we call home" (340). Not only is the question "who is Jesus?" more urgent than ever, Jesus himself is as relevant as ever, and *Christian Under* *standing* is a more-than-helpful reminder.

Ryana, S I G of u k r t e n a y , B r
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Return of the God Hypothesis: Three Scientific Discoveries that Reveal the Mind Behind the Universe

Stephen C. Meyer, New York: HarperCollins, 2021. Pp. 450 + 118.

This is not a theological book, but will be of interest to preachers and theologians where the authority of the physical sciences is high. Meyer, a geo-physicist and historian and philosopher of science, champions a theistic “hypothesis,” arguing that a transcendent, intelligent and actively personal “designer” is the best explanation for the origin of the universe and the development of planetary life. He is not a biblical literalist or “creationist,” does not reject evolutionary science, but thinks that the popular exponents of “The New Atheism” (Dawkins, Krauss, etc.) do not provide an adequate explanation of the beginning of the material universe, or a sufficient account of the ongoing development of complex life forms.

By “theism” he means the basic elements of Judeo-Christian belief in God, referring to such biblical texts as Psalm 19, Romans 1, texts from Job, Proverbs, and Jeremiah. He does not refer to these as authoritative, as a preacher might, but uses them only to identify what he means by “God” in his scientific discourse. This biblical belief in a personal, powerful deity was the concept affirmed by the great founders of modern science, such as Copernicus, Galileo, Kepler and Newton. While theology and science today are often regarded as oppositional, these foundational figures of modern science included a sovereign Creator of nature and its laws. Citing the Scottish theologian Thomas Torrance, he points out that late Catholic medieval and Reformation theology broke with the abstract “necessitarian” thinking of Greek thought, asserting rather the “contingent rationality” of nature as the work and choice of a rational God. (22-25). This understanding of the world as both contingent and intelligible provided impetus to study nature empirically (22-25).

He speaks of skeptical philosophers—Voltaire and Comte, Hume and Kant, and later thinkers—Marx, Darwin and Freud, all of whom reinforced the opposition of science and philosophy to any concept of a Creator. They tended to assume that the material universe was eternal.

Meyer specifically mentions three scientific discoveries of the last century or so that support a “God hypothesis” for scientific discourse:

First, it is now generally accepted that the universe had a beginning. In the 1920s, the astronomer Edwin Hubble, using a great new telescope, discovered the existence of far distant galaxies separate from the Milky Way, and observed that the galaxies were moving away from each

other in an “expanding universe.” Observation revealed that more distant galaxies recede at faster rates than those close by, so that, at any time in the finite past, they would have been closer than they are today. Extrapolating backward, all the galaxies would have converged. The moment of material convergence was the beginning of the expansion, and the beginning of the physical universe (84-86). Stephen Hawking would explain later: “at some point in the past, the distance between neighbouring galaxies must have been zero” (94). The scientific world was shocked and resistant to this news. Einstein, who had originally thought that the world was eternal and self-existent, was persuaded only when, in 1931, he visited Hubble’s telescope, and publicly acknowledged “the necessity of a beginning” (91-95). The convergence of Hubble’s evidence with Einstein’s relativity theory of gravity and “spacetime” came to be called “The Big Bang Theory.” Meyer comments that the new vision of a finite universe persuaded many scientists that “something like a creation event [was] produced by a cause that existed independently of matter, space, time and energy.” (97)

Second, he presents evidence from physics that from the beginning the universe was “strangely life-friendly.” The fine-tuning required for the precise conditions necessary for life are extremely improbable for a random process. The immense number of possible configurations is “a hyper-exponential number—10 billion raised to the 123rd power” (145-151). Moreover, the universe had to be purposefully fine-tuned to produce intelligent human beings to observe it. Citing the support of many distinguished scientists, Meyer argues that “events or systems that exhibit extreme improbability and functional specificity invariably result from the activity of a designing mind” (162). He points to highly complex combination locks, or the faces of American presidents at Mt. Rushmore, (products of human intelligence) as illustrations of the improbability that such phenomena could arise out of random processes (157-162). The complexity of natural phenomena are even more improbable than these human artifacts.

Third, he speaks of evidence from biology that, since the beginning, new functional information has arisen to make new forms of life possible. Citing many other scientists, he asserts that neo-Darwinian natural selection does not adequately explain the genetic information necessary to produce the DNA of the first living cells. It is implausible that even a single protein would have arisen by chance on the early earth, or over its 13.8 billion year history. The immensely complex amino-acid building blocks could not have assembled themselves or “self-organized” without pre-existing genetic information, which could only have come

from an intelligent source, especially considering the interdependence of DNA and proteins in the information-processing system (170-180). He also challenged Darwin's claim that natural selection acting randomly can explain the "Cambrian explosion," i.e., the abrupt, discontinuous appearance, about 530 million years ago, of many new groups of animals—not micro, but "macro-mutations," including new organs, whole body plans. Mutation and natural selection can explain "the survival of the fittest," but not "the arrival of the fittest" (189-196).

The latter half of the book includes a valuable philosophical discussion of "How to Assess a Metaphysical Hypothesis," and an assessment of theism versus pantheism and deism. Unfortunately he does not consider pan-en-theism or the question of the nature of divine intervention, or of God's presence within creation. He also expounds various current philosophic/scientific theories, e.g., string theory, multiple universes, and quantum mechanics, asserting the "causal inadequacy of materialistic explanations" which omit an intelligent, powerful Creator.

This is a dense, challenging read, but well worth the effort for those who wish to be literate in the dialogue of theology with the sciences.

*H a r o l d W e l l s E m m a n u e l
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