KOINONIA BETWEEN CHURCH AND WORLD

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I. THE SEARCH FOR THE INTEGRALITY OF ECCLESIOLOGY AND ETHICS

A. A Troubled Partnership

At the Fifth World Conference on Faith and Order, Bishop Desmond Tutu reminded the participants that Apartheid was 'too strong for a divided church.' By presenting the unity as an urgent 'practical imperative,' Tutu raised one of the crucial issues in contemporary ecumenical discussions, namely, the relationship between the struggle for the unity of the church and the church's engagement for justice. The concern for unity and the concern for justice have been intrinsic to the modern ecumenical movement from the beginning, represented, respectively, by the Faith and Order movement and the Life and Work movement. Yet these concerns have always existed to some degree in tension with one another. It should come as no surprise therefore that Bishops Tutu's remark echoes a statement from First Life and Work conference, in 1925: 'The sins and sorrows, the struggles and losses of the Great War and since have compelled the Christian Churches to recognize, humbly and with shame, that 'the world is too strong for a divided Church.' By stressing the importance of ecclesial unity for the sake of the


4 From 'The Message of the Conference,' par. 2, in: Edward Shillito, Life and Work:

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world, Tutu's statement, like that of Stockholm, in effect give priority to the struggle for justice, to which church unity becomes subservient. Since both concerns are commonly recognized as being integral to the ecumenical movement, a great deal of effort has been expended to dissipating the tension between the struggle for unity and for justice.

A crucial stage in the attempt to integrate the quest for unity and the struggle for justice was reached at the Uppsala Assembly when it urged that "the study on the unity of the Church must be placed in the context of the unity of mankind." The response to this mandate can be understood, according to Peter Lodberg, "as Faith and Order's first serious attempt to deal with the interaction of ecclesiology and ethics." At a major consultation in Salamanca in 1973, the ethical dimension of church unity was opened up via the notion of the Church as 'sacrament,' 'sign,' and 'instrument' in the history of God's mission in the world. Subsequently, the Vancouver Assembly (1983) rejuvenated the study 'The Unity of the Church--The Unity of Mankind,' renaming it 'The Unity of the Church and the Renewal of the Human Community.' This study process culminated in the 1990 report, *Church and World.* This document announces as its express goal 'Ove-

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5 The proposed Life and Work Conference, the invitation insists, "has nothing to do" with questions of faith and order. "Our Conference does not wish to deal with any controversial questions of theology or of ecclesial organization. By contrast, the Christian communions can already now without difficulty extend hands in various directions in order to deal with the large questions of our time in accordance with the foundation of Christian ethics and in the Spirit of Jesus Christ"; Wolfram Weisse, *Praktisches Christentum und Reich Gottes: Die Ökumenische Bewegung Life and Work 1919-1937* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991; Kirche und Konfession, Bd. 31), 516.

6 Already in 1928, Visser 't Hooft farsightedly maintained that "the unity of the Church could not possibly be promoted unless some synthesis could be found between Faith and Order and Life and Work". *Genesis and Formation*, WCC, Geneva, 1982.


10 David Gill, (ed.), *Gathered for Life* (Geneva: WCC, 1983), 49-50. This statement pointedly describes the tensions and polarizations as follows (p. 49): "For some, the search for unity in one faith and one eucharistic fellowship seems, at best, secondary, at worst irrelevant to the struggles for peace, justice and human dignity; for others the Church's political involvement against the evils of history seems, at best, secondary, at worst detrimental to its role as eucharistic community and witness to the gospel."