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Catholic-Protestant Colloquium at Harvard

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Review Articles

Catholic-Protestant Colloquium at Harvard

THERE is a distinct possibility that the term "ecumenical dialogue" may soon be applied to every gathering, no matter how trivial, at which representatives of various religious groups have been persuaded to appear. This is one of the dangers facing true progress in the new climate of trust engendered by the realization that all Christians of every denomination belong to each other. This realization has had its most dramatic witness in the sessions of the Second Vatican Council.

One major factor leading to a cheapening of the enterprise will be a failure to find, in the words of Cardinal Bea, "the harmony, so hard to achieve, between the love of truth and the love of neighbor". A notable venture which did succeed to a high degree in finding this harmony, if we may judge from the printed record*, was the Catholic-Protestant Colloquium at Harvard. Sponsored as a Protestant response to Vatican II by the Harvard Divinity School, the Colloquium brought together one hundred and sixty theologians and university scholars, equally divided in number between Protestants and Roman Catholics. The intellectual integrity and human charity displayed during the three days in March of

* ECUMENICAL DIALOGUE AT HARVARD: The Roman Catholic-Protestant Colloquium. Edited by Samuel H. Miller and G. Ernest Wright. Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press for Harvard University Press, 1964. xi, 385 pp.

1963 by the conference participants is an achievement to be emulated by subsequent gatherings, whether of scholars or the general laity, who meet under the banner of ecumenical dialogue.

The conference seems blessed with that appropriateness which is a work of the Holy Spirit. The setting was "unusually favorable" as Harvard President Nathan Pusey put it. Professor George Williams of the Divinity School agreed, saying that Harvard had, as it were, momentarily regained one of the important roles played by the medieval university, that of "providing the reasonable context in which we may corporately think through some of the moral, political and theological issues of the day." Most appropriate also was the choice of the keynote lecturer—Augustin Cardinal Bea, President of the Vatican Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity and the leading Catholic symbol of the importance of relevant encounter among conscientious scholars, both believers and agnostics.

Cardinal Bea's three Stillman Lectures on Christian Unity provide the basic pattern for possibilities, from the Catholic standpoint, for dialogue with separated brother Christians. Professor Williams has presented a five-fold summary of the framework of this pattern, which bears repeating here. The points are: "the recognition by Catholics (1) that non-Catholics individually and as religious communities belong with them to the same Mystical Body of Christ by virtue of valid baptism; (2) the 'Christian brethren', though jurisdictionally and in varying other ways separated, can, as Protestants, as Orthodox, or as members of the Lesser Eastern Churches, give valid testimony under the impulsion of the same Holy Spirit operative among churches in communion with the Holy See; (3) that, while visible unity with the successor of the Prince of the Apostles, in fulfillment of Jesus' prayer 'ut omnes unum sint', is the unswerving aim of Catholic ecumenicity, the inviolability of every human conscience and the dignity of every Catholic communion must be vigorously defended in the fraternal dialogue; (4) that dogmatic truth should be replaced by love, which may well mean in our age

restating truth in an idiom common to the participants in the dialogue and relevant to their era (*aggiornamento*); and (5) that Scripture is preeminent if heard in the mouth of the Church, the latter understood sometimes as the universal People of God or invisible Mystical Body, though more commonly as the Roman jurisdiction."

Cardinal Bea lucidly points to some of the causes for present misunderstandings in relations between Christian bodies, and challenges those in academic pursuits with responsibility for their removal. Lack of understanding, the shifting accentuations which have led various groups to over-emphasize one aspect of the Christian mystery, and the use of language inappropriate to the present situation are listed as hindrances to honest dialogue. Blame lies in both camps and the Cardinal provides historical cases in point.

Avoiding the charge of being long on diagnosis and short on cure, he mentions specific ways in which various of the disciplines—church history, biblical theology, history of dogma, and canon law—can assist by tracing again the history of human thought and its development. The suggestions expressed in this section find fuller treatment in the author's *The Unity of Christians*.¹

The second of the Stillman Lectures surveys the reactions of non-Catholic Christians to Pope John's call for the council and during the subsequent period of preparation. "We perceive how differently people reacted to the First and this Second Vatican Council" is Cardinal Bea's contribution as understatement-of-the-year. A truly impressive catalogue of statements of Protestant, Orthodox and Anglican leaders is given—and it is significant that the Cardinal uses careful and precise ecclesiastical terminology, referring to each of the non-Catholic Christian groups in words that they themselves would have chosen. He gives no place to the emotionally-charged

¹ *The Unity of Christians* by Augustin Cardinal Bea, edited by Bernard Leeming, S.J.; New York: Herder and Herder, 1963. Chapter 7 "How University Research and Teaching Can Further Christian Unity" p. 94.

labels of derogation often used by Christians when referring to groups outside their own.

Words of the former Archbishop of Canterbury, Lord Fisher of Lambeth, introduce the Cardinal's third lecture, presenting an evaluation and prognosis of the lasting effects of Vatican II upon relations between Catholic and non-Catholic Christians. In addition, the opinions of such leading Protestant figures as Dr. W. A. Visser 't Hooft, then General Secretary of the World Council of Churches, and the German Church leader, Dr. Martin Niemöller, are given ample hearing—giving expression to the truth that the Cardinal's range in interest is Catholic in other than the religious sense of the word.

One of the most encouraging of the Cardinal's prospects for the future is the assurance that the Council will "promote serious, orderly, theological dialogue and will take measures to ensure that future Catholic priests will be instructed during their years of training in the importance and the practice of ecumenical undertakings." It is to be hoped that the Holy Spirit will also inspire each of the Protestant seminaries, glorying in freedom from Pope, Council and Secretariat, to take similar measures within its own program of instruction.

The importance of understanding the *context of situation* of any formulation or institution is a key theme which is predominant throughout the major papers and seminar discussions of the Colloquium. Fr. Gregory Baum, of St. Michael's College and the Center of Ecumenical Studies at Toronto, presents a brief yet masterful interpretation of the Council's place in the history of the Church. Each of the antecedent movements is given credit in this assessment: the liturgical revival, biblical criticism (with special mention of form-criticism), catechetical renewal, theological evolution (toward a more resolute Christology and the emergence of an emphasis on historical and eschatological themes) and the lay and missionary movements. In his theological reflections, Fr. Baum argues the vital importance of viewing both Scripture and tradition as parts of a unitary source of revelation, for "if tradition is regarded as in some way independent from the Scriptures, we have no

principle by which to purify Catholic life, to distinguish what is healthy from what is unhealthy in it, and every effort of renewal will ultimately be an attempt at restoration."

Major papers and seminars followed the four-part scheme of the Colloquium topics—Scripture in relation to tradition and authority; the liturgical life of Christians, the meaning of reform, historically considered, and ethical questions, centering on the meaning of conscience.

Time and time again, the scholars present the results of a re-examination of the context—historical, psychological, etc.,—within which various biblical and theological emphases have been formulated, and the influence of the context upon such formulation. The Protestant scholar of the New Testament, W. D. Davies, presents evidence that various denominations have allowed their own contexts of situation and theological presuppositions to lead to some serious eisegesis,—or "reading-into" Scripture. For instance, recent critical study of the New Testament has led Protestants to an awareness of a discipline and order within the polity of the Early Church which is divergent from the classical image of that Church as an unstructured, gathered congregation, under spontaneous and charismatic leadership.

A second area of reconsideration is the positive role of "law" in primitive Christianity, and within the thought of the Apostle Paul. The "justification by faith" motif has often emphasized to the point of minimizing Paul's understanding of the Christian as under the "law of Christ". The context of situation in the 16th century led the Reformers to appeal to a Paul dominated by the conception of justification by faith, and to understand their own struggle with Rome in terms of Paul's struggle with Pharisaism. But recent Pauline studies, among which Davies' own *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism* is outstanding, show that Paul was himself bound to tradition. Thus biblical scholarship compels us to reexamine the grounds of our divisions as Christians.

Another saint, this time from the 13th century, receives consideration from the historian Gerhart Ladner of U.C.L.A.

Francis, though not a priest himself, brought about a most amazing spiritual revival in his society, and he did so without using the negative means of recrimination or revolt against the hierarchy of the Church. Attention is called to Francis of Assisi who through his example of repentance invited all men to a new and more personal form of Christian religiousness. He worked within the context of the situation in which he found himself. Ladner implies that there are important lessons to be learned by the non-clerical membership of Christian groups today, since "it may perhaps prove true that the *Reformatio* of the poor man of Assisi still has a great role to play in the never-ceasing renewal of the entire Church".

Since the place of Roman Catholic moral theology within the ecumenical dialogue has often been less clear to observers outside of that Church, it is reassuring to find three Catholic scholars contributing papers to this Colloquium. Fr. John L. Thomas, S. J. of St. Louis University writes of the theological and sociological issues in considering conscience in a pluralistic society. The inclusion of the sociological perspective is consistent with the view that the ethical outlooks and moral patterns springing from a religion depend not only upon the inherent logic of its doctrinal principles, "but also upon the cultural setting within which they are developed". When the cultural setting is one of pluralism as is that of the United States, the ethical situation becomes more complex, but moral sensitivity can also become more profound. Fr. Thomas suggests that members of the various religious confessions living together in such a pluralistic milieu must learn to practice considerate restraint in using political power to enforce their distinctive ethical views upon the social order.

It is Professor Charles E. Curran of St. Bernard's Seminary in Rochester who presents the most complete account of a Catholic view of conscience described in terms relevant to the present-day situation and context. Reality is complex. Formation of conscience must take into consideration the findings of many of the positive sciences in understanding this complexity. The dictate of conscience is concrete, subjective, individual, and existential. The return to primitive sources

of Scripture and the Fathers leads to consideration of conscience in the light of charity. Manualistic treaties have the great defects of extrinsicism and impersonalism and cannot meet the complexities of reality.

Curran mentions Ford and Kelly's *Contemporary Moral Theology* (reviewed in the April issue of *Philippine Studies*) as a convenient review of the recent literature on the subject of renewing moral theology, but finds the authors failing themselves fully "to appreciate the need for a life-centered and not confessional-oriented moral theology".

It is unfortunate that liturgics is the poor step-child in this book (if not in the conference itself). Each of the other fields is represented by two or more major papers. Cyril Richardson's "Word and Sacrament in Protestant Worship" is the only contribution in this field published in the volume. He observes that Catholic worship is becoming more Protestant and Protestant worship more Catholic, a judgment which found general agreement in the seminar discussion. Richardson, an Anglican priest who has taught liturgics to students at the leading Protestant seminary in the U.S. (Union Seminary in New York City) for several decades, is in a good position to speak for at least one side of the issue.

Richardson suggests three emphases which may point in the right direction toward overcoming the false antitheses which were posed on matters liturgical in the 16th century. The notion of worship itself can be deepened and enlarged. Deeper even than the word "worth" (as in worth-ship) is the notion of *being*. Worship is an act in which man recovers his being in relation to God. All worship is to be viewed as the means by which man discovers the true meaning of his existence and realizes the basic nature and destiny for which God intended Christian groups. Secondly, the concept of sacrifice has been too narrowly considered in all Western theology as connected with death, rather than as means to "make holy"—*sacer* and *facere*. Also the notion of participation in that which is sacramentally "re-called" or "re-presented"—that which has already been done but whose signi-

ficance lies beyond the historical moment in which it was done.

The *lex orandi lex credendi* principle, emphasizing the inter-relatedness of worship and belief, highlights the practical significance in the lives of Christians to the existing changes taking place in the liturgical life of the local parish church. It was one of the comments made in the seminar on Symbol and Sacrament which sums up the tone of the entire proceedings of the Colloquium that "the criticisms were based more on underlying theology rather than on practice." No one was out to embarrass his brother with a telling example of local parish failure to live up to professed ideals.

Ecumenical Dialogue at Harvard can serve well on the Philippine scene in many ways. As a study text for use in small discussion groups concerned with ecumenical matters, the book would be excellent. I believe that it would also suit the purpose of an "overview" type of course which is finding place in seminary curricula these days, most often in the final year of study.

Wherever groups of scholars get together in the ecumenical spirit—and this, too, is increasingly occurring in the Philippines—the experience at Harvard in March of 1963 will continue to serve as a guide and stimulus for continuing conversation.

JAMES GILL

A Layman's Reappraisal Of Contraception

PERHAPS no topic has caused as much stir in the world today and in the third session of Vatican Council II as the problem of birth control. It comes as no surprise to anyone when a moral theologian writes on this complex and controversial topic. But when a Catholic layman* not only brings us up-to-date on some of the key issues involved

* CONTRACEPTION AND CATHOLICS. By Louis Dupré. Baltimore-Dublin: Helicon Press, 1964. 94 pp.