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FROM JESUS CHRIST TO “GREEN ISSUES”.
DEVELOPMENT OR DEGENERATION
OF THE ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT?

Abstract

The article discusses the issue of the evolution of subjects in the ecumenical movement. At the beginning the ecumenical discourse was dominated by doctrinal issues, whereas today social, political and ethical themes stand at its forefront. This demonstrates the richness of the Gospel, in which a believer can find responses to questions about his or her everyday life; on the other hand, ecumenism is here in danger of forgetting its primary purpose. The article ends with a conclusion that ecumenism should be involved in the current social and ethical debates, but to preserve its identity it should focus on the Gospel of Jesus as the ultimate criterion.

Key words: ecumenism, ecumenical movement, doctrinal ecumenism, non-theological ecumenism.

What are the most important issues of the contemporary ecumenical movement? The answer to this question might seem quite simple: Christian unity, reconciliation, common witness and action, etc. The participants of ecumenical meetings and various inter-church bodies are already accustomed to writing documents on mutual doctrinal rapprochement. The activists of the ecumenical movement and the lecturers of ecumenism and comparative theology know very well that every ecumenical group tries to develop a new text which speaks of reconciliation between Christian Churches and Communities. When the ecumenical movement is at an impasse, and its subsequent achievements seem to be rather tedious, some of its activists indicate that the cause of ecumenical stagnation is the crisis existing in the movement's purposes. Has contemporary ecumenism degenerated into a campaign for social justice and environmental protection?

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1. QUESTIONABLE WAYS OF ECUMENISM: AN ORTHODOX CRITIQUE

The existing tendency to marginalise the doctrinal element of the faith in certain Christian circles has led to serious risks flowing from the interior of the ecumenical movement. The topics of ecumenical meetings and documents are evolving towards areas unrelated to the Christian message. One has to admit here that this phenomenon, which could particularly be seen in the work of the World Council of Churches (WCC), has been noticed with great perspicacity by the representatives of the Orthodox Churches.

This is not surprising since it is well known that the Orthodox Churches are particularly tied to the doctrinal heritage of Christianity. They pay particular attention to the importance of doctrinal conformity to the interpretation of the tenets of faith with the teaching of the Fathers. It seems that at a time when many Christian Churches and Communities are trying to follow the dominant trends in contemporary social and ethical discourse, the Orthodox Churches are witnessing the authentic Christian tradition. Their fidelity is expressed not only in their adherence to certain liturgical forms, but above all in maintaining traditional theological concepts. For these reasons some Orthodox theologians began articulating their concerns after the 6th Assembly of the WCC in Vancouver (1983). The topics of the meeting, held under the theme titled “Jesus Christ—the life of the world”, indicated that strictly Christian, doctrinal and moral issues had been pushed into the background during the Assembly. The main theme touched upon the division of the world, social justice, world peace and the survival of humankind. The course of the 7th Assembly of the WCC in Canberra (1991), in turn, resulted in a clear protest of the Orthodox delegates.¹ The scale of the protest was so significant that, after the Assembly the Orthodox Churches of Bulgaria and Georgia left the WCC in 1998.² The Assembly, the idea of which was to deepen the Christian understanding of the Holy Spirit in the Church and in

¹ Inter-Orthodox consultation after the Canberra assembly (Chambésy, Switzerland, 12-16 September 1991). *The Orthodox churches and the World Council of Churches*. Online: <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/ecumenical-movement-in-the-21st-century/member-churches/special-commission-on-participation-of-orthodox-churches/sub-committee-ii-style-ethos-of-our-life-together/inter-orthodox-consultation-after-the-canberra-assembly.html> [date of access: 10th July 2012]

² *Eastern Orthodoxy*. Online: <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/handbook/church-families/orthodox-churches-eastern/dictionary-of-the-ecumenical-movement-eastern-orthodoxy.html> [date of access: 10th July 2012]

the world, proved that—at least in some groups of Protestant theologians—the ecumenical movement was far from its original design.

The Orthodox critique of the activities of the WCC, presented in an official statement, expressed awareness of the danger that the movement for Christian unity could lose its essence. According to the Orthodox theologians the goal of all ecumenical activities, including the work of the WCC, is to restore the visible unity of Christians. Although this does not preclude the study of issues related to the unity of humankind and the protection of creation, it always remains in the perspective of the main objective. Having resigned from the ongoing commitment to the restoration of visible unity among Christians, the WCC can only develop into a forum for an exchange of ideas without a deep theological foundation. Therefore the activities of the WCC must become ecumenically ineffective. The Orthodox theologians note that in many of the WCC's texts does not appear a clear statement that Jesus Christ is the only Saviour of the world. This is accompanied by a departure from the essential content of the biblical Christian faith, such as: proclamation of the triune God, salvation, the Gospel, the creation of man and woman according to God's image and likeness and the Church founded by Christ. The intensity of contacts with non-Christian religions is insufficiently used to preach the Christian faith. In the context of the main subject of the Assembly in Canberra, the Orthodox theologians have noticed some signs of distortion of the Christian doctrine on the Holy Spirit. There is a tendency to easily recognise the presence of the Holy Spirit in various movements and events without regard to the sin and error that are present in every human action, which in no way can be attributed to the Spirit. Moreover, there have been attempts within the WCC to replace the Holy Spirit by the spirit of this world. Such an attitude is very distant from the Christian worldview. Summoning ghosts of "the creatures of earth, air, water and the sea" was particularly irritating to the Orthodox theologians during the Canberra Assembly. In their opinion, this kind of theological language may obfuscate the genuine Christian doctrine and, as a consequence, is a threat to the Christian identity of the ecumenical movement.³ Such a controversial and syncretistic call of the Holy Spirit actually took place during the Assembly in Canberra.⁴ Therefore, the allegation of relativism and syncretism

³ Inter-Orthodox consultation after the Canberra assembly (Chambésy, Switzerland, 12-16 September 1991).

⁴ In the text are mixed: syncretism, political correctness, anti-European attitude, and an understanding of the Holy Spirit which is far from an orthodox Christian teaching. It is worth quoting

seems at least partly justified. In a chapter entitled “No Other Name” in the book “The Gospel in a Pluralist Society” devoted to the pluralist theology, bishop Leslie Newbigin (1909-1998) quotes some of the statements of the ecumenical movement’s activists. Dr Diana Eck, a Methodist theologian, Professor at Harvard and former Moderator of the WCC programme on Dialogue, denies the idea that God has had only one incarnation: “This exclusive understanding of revelation which speaks of it as an event of the past and imprisons it in the first century, is also folly to many Christians.”⁵ Professor Christopher Durisingh, an Episcopalian theologian, former Secretary of the Council for World Mission, writes: “It is not through our a priori doctrinal formulations on God or Christ, but rather through our collective human search for meaning and sacredness, that the ‘universe of faiths’ should be adequately understood.”⁶ The current direction of the ecumenical movement seems to justify such statements.

The criticism coming from the Orthodox representatives in the WCC relates to the change taking place in the organisation’s direction. Ecumenical care for issues important to Christian unity (e.g. the unity of the Christian doctrine, the search for a visible ecclesial community, the authenticity of Christian missions), which once led to the first World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh in 1910 and which has always been important to the Orthodox Church, is increasingly less visible in texts of the WCC, while the political and social commitment of the Christian communities is becoming increasingly important. Even the very concept and tasks of theology repre-

at least parts of this famous text, to understand the indignation of the Orthodox theologians: “Come. The spirit of Hagar, Egyptian, black slave woman exploited and abandoned by Abraham and Sarah, the ancestors of our faith [...]. Come, The spirit of Joan of Arc, and of the many other women burnt at the ‘witch trials’ throughout the medieval era. Come. The spirit of the people who died during the crusades. Come. The spirit of indigenous people of the earth, victims of genocide during the time of colonialism and the period of the great Christian mission to the pagan world [...]. Come. The spirit of Mahatma Gandhi, Steve Biko, Martin Luther King Jr, Malcolm X, Victor Jara, Oscar Romero and many unnamed women freedom fighters who died in the struggle for liberation of their people [...]. Come. The spirit of the Amazon rain forest now being murdered every day. Come. The spirit of earth, air and water, raped, tortured and exploited by human greed for money. Come. The spirit of soldiers, civilians and sea creatures now dying in the bloody war in the Gulf. come. The spirit of the Liberator, our brother Jesus, tortured and killed on the cross” (Ch. Hyun Kyung. *Come, Holy Spirit – Renew the Whole Creation*. In: *The Ecumenical Movement. An Anthology of Key Texts and Voices*. Ed. by M. Kinnamon, B. E. Cope. Geneva: WCC Publications 1997 pp. 231-232).

⁵ Quoted in: L. Newbigin. *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*. London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge 2004² p. 156.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

sented by some participants of the ecumenical meetings have little in common with theology in the classic Christian sense. Is the acceptance of religious syncretism an expression of "politically correct" ecumenism? This direction of development within the WCC is leading to doubts about whether ecumenism still serves its purpose. The objectives of ecumenism, formulated in Edinburgh in 1910, are expressly contained in the Gospel and in the uninterrupted tradition of the Church. They do not depend on human recognition and cannot be changed on the basis of the political and social situation.

2. NEW ISSUES OF THE DIALOGUE: PROGRESS OR THE FALSE PATH OF ECUMENISM

Perhaps the new themes of the WCC's work are determined by the authentic development of the ecumenical movement? Maybe the new topics that are appearing in the documents of the ecumenical bodies are a sign that Christianity has the right to actively participate in discussions on key social and political issues? To answer these questions one can briefly examine the WCC Assemblies' themes and their correlation with the political and social processes taking place in the second half of the 20th and early 21st century.

A. AMSTERDAM 1948: FAITH AFTER WAR CRIMES COMMITTED BY CHRISTIANS

The famous Amsterdam Message during the first Assembly of the WCC (1948), expressed the shape of Christian faith in a new post-war reality. Christians were aware of the atrocities and crimes that had been committed during the Second World War. Although peace prevailed, not all nations could enjoy true freedom in the epoch of the Cold War that had just begun. In that new political and social reality the nascent ecumenical movement expressed the desire for Christians to act together in the name of Jesus Christ: "When we look to Christ, we see the world as it is — His world, to which He came and for which He died. It is filled both with great hopes and also with disillusionment and despair. Some nations are rejoicing in new freedom and power, some are bitter because freedom is denied them, some are paralysed by division, and everywhere there is an undertone of fear. There are millions who are hungry, millions who have no home, no country and no hope. Over all mankind hangs the peril of total war. We have to accept God's judgment upon us for our share in the world's guilt. Often we have tried to serve God

and mammon, put other loyalties before loyalty to Christ, confused the Gospel with our own economic or national or racial interests, and feared war more than we have hated it.”⁷ Thus, the WCC’s activity started from the confrontation of life and the conduct of Christians within the reality of the war and post-war period. The Second World War, especially the enormity of crimes that had occurred during it, in which Christians had also taken part, changed the face of the emerging ecumenical movement—ecumenical activity could not be confined only to doctrinal and moral issues. Although during the war many Christians, through their martyrdom, had given true proof of their faith, many others had, at the same time, failed. The message from Amsterdam called forth this fact. The activity of the WCC, therefore, had to take into account the credibility of Christianity and the effectiveness of the Christian mission. How could the Christian message about God who is Love and about Jesus Christ who is the “Prince of Peace”, be credible if many Christians had not shown their love during the war and the official Churches had not been able to preserve the peace?

Although the message of the Amsterdam meeting was undoubtedly related specifically to contemporary social and political events, the WCC did not abandon preaching the faith. On the contrary, in a situation where people, even believers, had failed, the only hope for the world and for mankind was Jesus Christ. The more sin seemed to be powerful in the world, the more Christians had to preach the word of God: “It is not in man’s power to banish sin and death from the earth, to create the unity of the Holy Catholic Church, to conquer the hosts of Satan. But it is within the power of God. He has given us at Easter the certainty that His purpose will be accomplished.”⁸ But Christian faith was not to mean inactivity of believers against evil and injustice in the world: “By our acts of obedience and faith, we can on earth set up signs which point to the coming victory. Till the day of that victory our lives are hid with Christ in God and no earthly disillusion or distress or power of hell can separate us from Him. As those who wait in confidence and joy for their deliverance, let us give ourselves to those tasks which lie to our hands, and so set up signs that men may see.”⁹

⁷ First Assembly of the WCC, Amsterdam 1948. *Message*. In: *The Ecumenical Movement. An Anthology of Key Texts and Voices...* pp. 21-22.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

⁹ *Ibid.*

B. COLD WAR: CHRISTIAN WITNESS AGAINST POLITICAL AND SOCIAL PROBLEMS

The ecumenical movement developed during the Cold War. In the face of the constant threat of a global nuclear conflict, the ecumenical bodies could not remain silent. Even the fragile peace that existed was disturbed by the rivalries of the nuclear powers and by conflicts in the Third World. To this came problems pertaining to colonialism and the struggle for independence of the colonial countries. In this context it was impossible not to note that Christian Churches and Communities had once also been involved in the colonial policy of the European powers.

These problems of the ecumenical movement were reflected in the meetings of the WCC. In Evanston (1954) the Christian delegates spoke of the many causes of unrest in the world. The social and political topics did not, however, overshadow the core of the Christian faith. The message from Evanston admitted that the Christian task was to fight for freedom, justice and peace. But the Christian faith had to go far beyond earthly and temporal hopes. In any situation faith says that men and women have been created by God for a higher purpose. Men and women are called to know and love God, to worship and to serve Him. Ultimately, only God can satisfy the human desire for happiness and peace. So a call for disarmament and non-proliferation¹⁰ went together with a profession of faith in Jesus Christ, the true God and true Man, crucified and risen, who would come to judge the living and the dead. The need for concrete action for justice and peace did not deny the obligation of proclaiming Jesus Christ to the world: quite the opposite—faith in Jesus, who is the ultimate hope for humankind, gave Christians the strength to work and fight¹¹ because “Christian social responsibility is grounded in the mighty acts of God, who is revealed in Jesus Christ our Lord.”¹²

¹⁰ P. Weiderud. *The WCC concern for nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation*. Online: <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-commissions/international-affairs/peace-and-disarmament/nuclear-weapons/the-wcc-concern-for-nuclear-disarmament-and-non-proliferation.html> [date of access: 10th July 2012]; Terza Assemblea [del CEC], New Delhi 1961, *Seconda sezione. Servizio*, In: *Enchiridion Oecumenicum*. Vol. 5: *Consiglio Ecumenico delle Chiese. Assemblee generali 1948-1998*. Ed. by S. Rosso, E. Turno. Bologna: Edizioni Dehoniane 2001 pp. 241-242.

¹¹ Seconda Assemblea [del CEC], Evanston 1954. *Messaggio*. In: *Enchiridion Oecumenicum*. Vol. 5: *Consiglio Ecumenico delle Chiese. Assemblee generali 1948-1998...* pp. 89-90.

¹² Second Assembly of the WCC, Evanston 1954. *Report of Section III: Social Questions – the Responsible Society in a World Perspective*. In: *The Ecumenical Movement. An Anthology of Key Texts and Voices...* p. 282.

During that period, efforts towards world peace and against violence were an important area of the ecumenical activities. Although the ecumenical movement had never openly advocated pacifism, the participation of Christians in acts of violence was clearly condemned.¹³ In the struggle for peace the ecumenical movement was undoubtedly influenced by Western European left-wing political lobbies. Therefore, in the ecumenical texts there were also signs of praise for revolutionary movements (in fact: communist ones) of the 1960s and 1970s.¹⁴

The ecumenical movement underlined the importance of moral values. On the one hand, it was related to the violation of human rights in totalitarian countries; on the other hand, moral issues became important in the capitalist world, where in the process of post-war economic recovery human dignity was sometimes neglected.¹⁵ In the context of economic change, especially in the era of industrialisation and technological development, Christians affirmed human dignity. The ecumenical movement was committed to defending men and women against an inhumane vision of technical and economic progress.¹⁶

The ecumenical movement was not limited to the countries of the “old” Christianity. The post-war transformation contributed to the appreciation of vigorously growing Christian communities in non-European countries. Especially the fall of colonialism gave these communities the possibility of witnessing the Gospel in their own way. The discovery of the fact that Christianity was not confined to European culture encouraged ecumenical activists to redefine the understanding of Christian unity. The ecumenical movement had to critically evaluate cultures in which Christian communities lived. The end of colonialism meant that Christians could no longer be the promoters of European culture and values. The Gospel of Jesus Christ may well be ex-

¹³ WCC Central Committee, *Violence, Nonviolence and the Struggle for Social Justice* (1973). In: *The Ecumenical Movement. An Anthology of Key Texts and Voices...* p. 217.

¹⁴ For example: R. Shaull *The Revolutionary Challenge to Church and Theology* (World Conference on Church and Society, Geneva, 1966). In: *The Ecumenical Movement. An Anthology of Key Texts and Voices...* pp. 299-303.

¹⁵ Seconda Assemblea [del CEC], Evanston 1954. *Quarta sezione. Questioni internazionali: i cristiani nella lotta per la comunità mondiale*. In: *Enchiridion Oecumenicum. Vol. 5: Consiglio Ecumenico delle Chiese. Assemblee generali 1948-1998...* p. 151; Terza Assemblea [del CEC], New Delhi 1961, *Rapporto del comitato del dipartimento chiesa e società*, In: *Enchiridion Oecumenicum. Vol. 5: Consiglio Ecumenico delle Chiese. Assemblee generali 1948-1998...* pp. 284-286.

¹⁶ Terza Assemblea [del CEC], New Delhi 1961, *Rapporto del comitato del dipartimento chiesa e società*, In: *Enchiridion Oecumenicum. Vol. 5: Consiglio Ecumenico delle Chiese. Assemblee generali 1948-1998...* pp. 289-290.

pressed in terms of other cultures and ethical systems because the message of Jesus goes beyond national and cultural borders¹⁷. For this reason, the ecumenical movement considered itself also bound to indicate and condemn detrimental links between religion, nationalism and the secular ideologies existing in several countries. Such links could compromise the authentic Christian message. In an increasingly multicultural world, and in multicultural Christianity, such relationships could only weaken the genuine quest for Christian unity.¹⁸ As the 5th Assembly of the WCC in Nairobi (1975) states: "the Church's oneness has to include and to transcend every culture, but the gospel cannot be wholly separated from those cultures through which it has in fact come to us. For the sake of witnessing to the gospel of Christ the Church is free to ground itself firmly in the culture and life style of every people to whom it is sent. Otherwise it would die like a potted plant with no roots in the local soil, rather than find life as a seed which dies to bear fruit. There is no single culture peculiarly congenial to the Christian message; each culture is to be both shaped and transcended by that message."¹⁹

The ecumenical reflection on colonialism involved the problem of racism. It is true that some Christian Churches and Communities in the colonial countries had once been embroiled in racial politics and had even applied racist criteria in respect of their members. Racism, however, precludes any true Christian unity. It threatens the authenticity of the message preached by the Church. Thus, the fight against racism was one of the major issues raised in the ecumenical movement.²⁰

Among the topics of the WCC's work there began to appear the issue of women's rights and the roles of men and women in a modern society. The New Delhi Report (1961) of the Committee on Cooperation of men and Women in Church, Family and Society pointed out that many member Churches of the WCC allowed the ordination of women. It was noted that some Christian communities still did not adequately recognise the importance of the ministry of women in the Church. Promoting the role of women in the Church has therefore become one of the tasks of the ecumenical

¹⁷ Terza Assemblea [del CEC], New Delhi 1961, *Rapporto del comitato del dipartimento chiesa e società*, In: *Enchiridion Oecumenicum*. Vol. 5: *Consiglio Ecumenico delle Chiese. Assemblee generali 1948-1998...* pp. 284-286.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 285.

¹⁹ Fifth Assembly of the WCC. *Report of Section II: What Unity Requires*, In: *The Ecumenical Movement. An Anthology of Key Texts and Voices...* p. 113.

²⁰ General Council of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches. *Racism and South Africa* (1982). In: *The Ecumenical Movement. An Anthology of Key Texts and Voices...* pp. 221-222.

movement. A similar task also applied to family matters. Rapid social change required Christians to act in favour of equality between women and men, especially in those societies where women were still subordinated to men and could not decide on matters concerning their lives. The activities of the WCC for women also had to include social changes, so that men and women in a modern society have the same freedom and dignity.²¹

This random and necessarily fragmentary overview of the ecumenical movement's main themes shows that the quest for Christian unity is associated with issues of political, social and economic development. During the Cold War Christians were often confronted with difficult moral choices between fidelity to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and loyalty to their own people and country. For this reason, in the activity of the ecumenical movement, the first goal of which is to fully restore the visible unity of Christians, there are several non-theological topics. The Christian doctrine cannot be separated from the problems of the everyday life of Christians. Especially in the context of the confrontation between the two great political and military systems of the Cold War period, the ecumenical movement saw that there were certain factors concerning the division of the Church, which had to be solved by an in-depth analysis of moral and social issues. At the same time—as has been shown by the documents of the ecumenical bodies—Christians did not abandon the Gospel as the primary criterion of transformation and improvement of their social life.

C. THE LAST TWO DECADES: THE VOICE OF CHRISTIANITY ON THE PROTECTION OF CREATION, SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS

The change of the global political situation after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the communist bloc has contributed to modifying the scope of the ecumenical groups. Women's rights, environmental protection and inter-religious dialogue had already appeared in the earlier period as themes of the ecumenical documents. Now, however, these issues – it seems – became dominant in the ecumenical movement,²² especially in the work of the

²¹ Terza Assemblea [del CEC], New Delhi 1961, *Rapporto del comitato del dipartimento per la cooperazione tra uomini e donne nella chiesa, famiglia e sovietà*, In: *Enchiridion Oecumenicum*. Vol. 5: *Consiglio Ecumenico delle Chiese. Assemblee generali 1948-1998...* pp. 309-319.

²² WCC Convocation on Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation (Seoul, 1990). *Ten Affirmations on Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation*. In: *The Ecumenical Movement. An Anthology of Key Texts and Voices...* pp. 317-324.

dialogue groups within the Protestant communities. Ecumenical groups devote a great deal of work to environmental issues associated with the protection of creation and with the rational management of the earth's natural resources.²³ Preserving creation and the earth's natural resources is now recognised as the key task of humankind because from a Christian point of view, men and women received earth and its resources to use them prudently—as users, not as owners—thus environmental issues are also effectively connected with the Christian worldview. But the question arises: How is commitment to the environment associated with the aims of the ecumenical movement? What is more, the aforementioned doctrinal controversies also raise doubts as to whether—in the name of an ill-conceived concern for the environment—the ecumenical movement does not distort the essence of the Christian faith. Does appreciating creation in Christian environmental discourse not take place at the expense of human dignity?

Christian activity on gender and women's rights raises similar concerns and doubts. The end of the 1990s was, in the ecumenical movement, a period lived as the "Ecumenical Decade" (1988-1998) which was related to the Decade of Solidarity with Women announced by the United Nations. In this way, the ecumenical movement more fully joined the struggle for full equality between men and women and the worldwide campaign against women's discrimination in social, political and church life.²⁴ This commitment has led to problems within the WCC and within its member Churches. If the relationship between men and women in society is based solely on categories of rights and obligations, then the questions posed to Catholics and Orthodox Christians by the Protestant communities seem to be obvious: How can they justify the ordination of men only? Can they give a convincing explanation as to why they restrict the right to preach the word of God only to ordained persons, and therefore—in both Orthodox and Catholic church practice—to men only? There is also doubt as to whether the division of social roles based on the Gospel category of vocation (referring also to the ministries of the Church) has not been replaced in the ecumenical movement, under the influence of secularist thought, by a discourse on rights and obliga-

²³ WCC Conference on Faith, Science and the Future (Boston, 1979). *Towards a New Christian Social Ethics and New Social Policies for the Churches*. In: *The Ecumenical Movement. An Anthology of Key Texts and Voices...* p. 311.

²⁴ M. J. Mananzan et al. *The Spirit Is Troubling the Water. Statement on the Ecumenical Decade: Churches in Solidarity with Women*. In: *The Ecumenical Movement. An Anthology of Key Texts and Voices...* pp. 224-225.

tions. It should also be noted that this direction of work of the ecumenical bodies has led to their involvement in further ethical dilemmas, such as reproductive rights or gender equality and non-discrimination of LGBT people. Although these are extremely important religious and social issues of the early 21st century, one can reasonably ask whether solving them is the ecumenical movement's task? And if so—whether the ecumenical bodies expect that one day all Christian Churches and Communities will reach a compromise on such difficult issues?

3. EVOLUTION OR DECLINE OF ECUMENISM?

According to the words of Willem Visser't Hooft during the 4th Assembly of the WCC in Uppsala, the ecumenical movement has both a horizontal and a vertical dimension. Bringing people to God always means their mutual reconciliation and rapprochement. That is why Christians do not escape from the mundane problems of human life: "A Christianity which has lost its vertical dimension has lost its salt and is not only insipid in itself, but unless for the world. But a Christianity which would use the vertical preoccupation as a means to escape from its responsibility for and in the common life on man is a denial of the incarnation, of God's love for the world manifested in Christ."²⁵ Thus, it is not surprising that the ecumenical movement raises not only theological issues, as non-theological factors play an important role in causing and perpetuating divisions among Christians. The document prepared after the conference held at the Ecumenical Institute in Bossey lists many of these factors – social, historical, psychological or economic ones.²⁶ However, in restoring unity in this field Christians cannot base solely on their own ideas and own efforts: "Such factors have acquired enormous power over us. They are not incidental: they are compounded of the very stuff of earthly history and human sin. The only power which can overcome them is the power of God through Jesus Christ."²⁷

It seems that today, when Christians are aware of their responsibility for the world and for the destiny of humankind and want to have a voice in the

²⁵ W. Visser't Hooft, *The Mandate of the Ecumenical Movement*, in: *The Ecumenical Movement. An Anthology of Key Texts and Voices...* p. 39.

²⁶ *Non-theological Factors that May Hinder or Accelerate the Church's Unity*. In: *The Ecumenical Movement. An Anthology of Key Texts and Voices...* pp. 214-215.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 216.

most important social and political matters, the problem of concentrating ecumenical bodies on secondary issues not directly related to the Christian doctrine nor to Christian unity can only increase. In this context, the voice of the Orthodox theologians, sensitised to fidelity to the apostolic tradition of the Church, reminds us that by taking up the problems of the world and humanity, the ecumenical movement must never lose its primary purpose.

It can be concluded that the ecumenical movement has the right to extend its research subjects to respond to urgent needs and to the most vital issues Christians are facing today. In this way the ecumenical bodies also show that the Christian faith is not a relic of the past nor does it only refer to the eschatological future. Faith can transform the individual and social situation of the men and women who believe in Jesus Christ. In this faith a believer can find answers to questions about his or her everyday life. But to show the power of faith, the ecumenical movement can never move away from the Word of God as its ultimate criterion. It is in the light of the Gospel that proposals and demands issued by the ecumenical groups should be evaluated. Faithfulness can also protect ecumenical activists from losing their Christian identity. Finally, fidelity to the Gospel still makes the ecumenical movement aware of its main goal—the achievement of a full visible unity among Christians through which the Gospel can be preached in a more authentic and credible way to the world.

With this attitude the ecumenical movement will never become one of the many ideological currents or social movements. Christians have to offer something far greater than another human ideology or ethical system: they should preach to the world a “teaching with authority” (Mark 1:27) which comes from Christ.

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OD JEZUSA CHRYSYSTUSA DO OCHRONY PRZYRODY.
ROZWÓJ CZY DEGENERACJA RUCHU EKUMENICZNEGO?

Streszczenie

Artykuł omawia zagadnienie ewolucji tematów podejmowanych w ruchu ekumenicznym. W swoich początkach dyskurs ekumeniczny był zdominowany przez kwestie doktrynalne. Tymczasem obecnie na jego czoło wysuwają się problemy społeczne, polityczne i etyczne. Ukazuje to bogactwo Ewangelii, w której wierzący może odnaleźć odpowiedzi na pytania dotyczące jego codziennego życia. Zarazem jednak ekumenizm znajduje się tutaj w niebezpieczeństwie zapomnienia o swoim zasadniczym celu. Artykuł zmierza do wniosku, że ekumenizm powinien wprawdzie włączać się w aktualną debatę społeczną i etyczną, jednak dla zachowania własnej tożsamości winien stale skupiać się na Ewangelii Jezusa Chrystusa jako na swoim ostatecznym kryterium.

Słowa kluczowe: ekumenizm, ruch ekumeniczny, ekumenizm doktrynalny, ekumenizm pozateologiczny.