

Editorial

THE THEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF ECUMENICAL ENCOUNTER

THE NORTH AMERICAN section of Faith and Order has undertaken as part of its study programme an analysis of the theological significance of local and national councils of churches. It may be time that someone made a study of the theological significance of ecumenical conferences, both of the informal and of the more formal kind.

Many of the readers of this *Journal* will have had the privilege of attending a meeting or conference with Christians of other denominations, extending over one, two, or several days, where the object was to discover wherein our unity and differences as members of the Church of Jesus Christ really lie. We have joined together in Bible study, worship, discussions, and personal conversations in the context of prayer for the presence and guidance of God in his Holy Spirit. Most often in the course of such a conference we have experienced as living truth and reality what in faith we are forced to confess—that the Church of Jesus Christ is one, in a given unity transcending all our differences, and that we really are brethren one of another. We cannot doubt that the source and ground of this experienced unity is God in his Word and Holy Spirit. Often our conferences have concluded with a confession of this fact and, under the vision and inspiration of the hour, venturesome decisions have been taken to commit ourselves in definite ways to make more visible in our denominational activities and interdenominational relations the unity in diversity we have experienced there. Sometimes it happens that official or semi-official representatives of churches will express themselves as having been moved by the Spirit of God at the conference to take new, courageous, venturing action of an ecumenical kind.

Then comes the aftermath! We each return to the confines of our own denominational life and activities, and the loyalties which seem appropriate thereto. We make a report or two about the conference and the richness of the experience we had there. But we talk to those who have not met, prayed, studied, and conversed with Christians of another church and who have not experienced the Spirit of Unity in the witness to the Word of God's reconciling love in Jesus Christ. Those who listen may show some interest, but only a mild concern. And we, whose inspiration is not constantly fed through common worship, study, and conversation with Christians beyond our own circle, tend to lose our vision and commitment, and become once more churchmen of a strictly denominational sort.

After the more formal conference, the disillusioning aftermath is often worse. For now what we as representative churchmen believed that we

had discovered, and were moved to confess, concerning our unity in Christ through the Holy Spirit, and the commitments to ecumenical endeavour which we as persons made, have to be shown, interpreted, and urged upon others—boards, committees, and ministries, comprised of persons who did not attend our conference and thus who experienced no such unity in Word and Spirit as we believed ourselves really and truly to have done. So we find our commitments nullified and our visions dimmed by the resistance of others to them. As a result we may even find ourselves acquiescing in separatist activities, which are the exact opposite of what we were committed to at conference time.

Now the theological question arises: Can God really speak and move and convince in an ecumenical conference? What is the relation between what he says and does there to what he says and does through the ordinances and organizations of the Church in their denominational setting? Were we wrong when we confessed him present in the former encounter in new and creative ways, calling forth obedience to a commitment to one another transcending our isolated life as denominational Christians? If we were not wrong in this, then those who resist us in our vision, and refuse to act with us in our commitment, are wrong and stand opposed to God. But how many of us will dare to say so, and to keep on saying so?

W.O.F.

ANNOUNCEMENT: SUBSCRIPTION RATES

THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS of the *Canadian Journal of Theology* at the Annual Meeting of 1962 regretfully came to the conclusion that it was necessary to raise the subscription rates effective with the next issue. After more than seven years of successful publication the costs of printing and handling the *Journal* are such that an increase has become unavoidable. The Board believes that subscribers will appreciate that nevertheless the *Canadian Journal of Theology* still represents excellent value for money. Current subscribers may renew their subscription at the old rate *until 1 October 1962*. Renewals received thereafter will be accepted at the new rate.

The new rate for subscriptions to the *Canadian Journal of Theology* is as follows:

Regular subscription	\$4.00 a year
Two-year subscription	\$7.50
Student subscription	\$2.50 a year
Two-year subscription	\$5.00
Subscription in the United Kingdom	30s. a year