

Andrews University

## Digital Commons @ Andrews University

---

Faculty Publications

---

11-1-1961

### The Faith and Order Commission - Part 1

Earle Hilgert

*Andrews University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/pubs>



Part of the [Christian Denominations and Sects Commons](#)

---

#### Recommended Citation

Hilgert, Earle, "The Faith and Order Commission - Part 1" (1961). *Faculty Publications*. 4035.

<https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/pubs/4035>

This Popular Press is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ Andrews University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Andrews University. For more information, please contact [repository@andrews.edu](mailto:repository@andrews.edu).

# The Faith and Order Commission-1

By EARLE HILGERT

Vice-President for Academic Administration, Andrews University

THE Commission on Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches held its triennial meeting at Bristol, England, from July 30 to August 8, 1967. More than 100 members of the commission from some 70 different denominations met to discuss the theological doctrines and the organizational and liturgical practices that divide them, and to seek further steps on the road to church unity.

## The Faith and Order Movement

In order to understand the significance of this meeting, it is necessary to look back over the history of the Faith and Order Movement. (A good survey will be found in John E. Skoglund and J. Robert Nelson, *Fifty Years of Faith and Order*, New York, 1963.) The root of the movement may be traced to a book by William Reed Huntington, *The Church Idea*, published in 1870, in which the author, an American Episcopalian, set forth four points as a possible basis for Christian unity: the Scriptures as the Word of God; the creeds of the early church as the rule of faith; the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper; and the historic episcopate as the basis for organizational unity. In 1888 these four points, substantially as Huntington had proposed them, were adopted by the bishops of the Anglican Church at the Lambeth Conference of that year, and thereafter were known as the Lambeth Quadrilateral. In ensuing years this proposal continued to be of increasing importance in all ecumenical discussion and in 1920 formed the basis for another declaration of the Lambeth Conference, "An Appeal to All Christian People," in which the Anglican bishops urged the Christian world to strive for a united church.

In the meantime the idea of the Faith and Order Movement had been born in 1910 at the Edinburgh Missionary Conference, when Bishop Charles H. Brent, an Episcopal missionary in the Philippines, called for an international, interdenominational conference on questions of doc-

trine and organization. Almost immediately plans for such a meeting began to be laid. But particularly because of the first world war it was not until the summer of 1920 that a preliminary meeting of such a conference was able to convene in Geneva, Switzerland. This gathering marks the official beginning of the Faith and Order Movement. Representatives from 40 countries and 70 denominations were present, and constituted the most diversified body of Christians ever to have come together. The invitation to this meeting had been issued to all Christian groups "which confess our Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour." Ever since, this has remained the basic doctrinal criterion for participation in the Faith and Order Movement. The same standard has been adopted by the World Council of Churches. The Geneva Conference concerned itself chiefly with the question of the nature of Christian unity and laid the groundwork for the First World Conference on Faith and Order, which met at Lausanne, Switzerland, in August, 1927.

## The Lausanne Conference

The Lausanne Conference continued for almost three weeks. It was notable for a number of things: For the first time, a wide representation from the Eastern Orthodox churches was present, though these churches declined to concur with most of the reports of the conference. Ever since, however, the Orthodox churches have shared with increasing involvement in the Faith and Order Movement. The conference pointed clearly to the gospel and its proclamation to the world as a basic factor.

Perhaps most important for an understanding of the history of the movement was the methodology developed at Lausanne. A pattern was set there defining the work of Faith and Order to be largely that of studying the differences between the various communions in the hope that such study would lead to better understanding of one another's positions

and ultimately to the possibility of bridging any gulfs.

A decade passed until the Second World Conference on Faith and Order met in August, 1937, in Edinburgh, Scotland. Here a number of topics were discussed that had been developed by several committees prior to the conference. This procedure—the discussion of papers previously prepared by groups appointed for the purpose—ever since has characterized Faith and Order meetings. The most significant result of the Edinburgh Conference was an "Affirmation of Union in Allegiance to Our Lord Jesus Christ," which was unanimously adopted. Here it was recognized that any steps toward unity among churches must have Jesus Christ at their center. This Christological basis for unity has remained a fundamental position of the movement.

## The Lund Meeting

The Third World Conference on Faith and Order was not able to meet until 15 years later, the summer of 1952, at Lund, Sweden. In the meantime, many changes had occurred, both in the world in general and in the ecumenical movement. World War II and its aftermath had brought vast political and social alterations, and in 1948 the World Council of Churches had been formed, involving a merger of Faith and Order with a parallel ecumenical group, the Christian Life and Work Movement. The former now became the Commission on Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches. From a movement whose chief expression had consisted in world conferences at infrequent intervals, it now became, under the aegis of the World Council, a well-organized structure holding regular working sessions every three years in preparation for further world conferences to be held from time to time. It also had the responsibility of developing proposals for consideration at assemblies of the World Council, such as occurred at Evanston, Illinois, in

1954 and at New Delhi, India, in 1961.

The meeting at Lund was a major turning point in the history of the Faith and Order Movement. Already at Amsterdam six years before, a report on the church had been presented that pointed to the difference between those in Christianity who understood the church as "catholic" and those who conceived of it as "protestant," and adjudged this difference to be "irreconcilable." The Lund Conference faced up to this and realized that the methodology of comparative conversation between those holding differing views had only brought them to an impasse. Out of the discussions at this meeting developed a new, post-Lund methodology of ecumenical study that has characterized the work of Faith and Order ever since. This was to seek to bridge the division between the "catholic" and the "protestant" concepts of the church through joint study on theological and organizational problems common to all, with the conviction that in seeking cooperatively a truly Christ-centered answer to these problems, they might also draw closer to each other. The Lund Conference was significant, too, for the fact that for the first time, a large number of representatives from the younger churches of Africa, Asia, and Latin America participated.

#### Subsequent Meetings

During the following years, the Faith and Order Commission met at regular intervals to carry on the work that had been given a new direction at Lund: in 1957 at New Haven, Connecticut; in 1960 at St. Andrews, Scotland. The next World Conference on Faith and Order convened at Montreal in July, 1963. Here 232 delegates, with a total of nearly 500 persons including observers and guests, worked on five major themes following the lines laid down at Lund: the church in the purpose of God; Scripture, tradition and traditions; the redemptive work of Christ and the ministry; worship and the oneness of Christ's church; "all in each place": the process of growing together.

One of the major concerns of the Montreal meeting centered around the fifth theme mentioned above, embodied in the phrase, "all in each place." Originally conceived by Bishop J. E. Lesslie Newbigin, these words had become at the New Delhi assembly of the World Council in 1961 a succinct definition of the ecumenical movement's concept of unity. This phrase sets forth the goal that all baptized and confessing Christians "in each place" should be brought together by the Holy Spirit "into one fully-committed fellowship" in which they share one faith, preach one gospel, partake together of the Lord's

Supper, join in common prayer, and witness together to the world (see *The New Delhi Report*, p. 116).

A number of important insights, and also frustrations, emerged from the Montreal meeting. The section concerned with the nature of the church, while agreeing on the Christocentric basis of the church, encountered great difficulties in finding agreement in many areas of this subject. Out of these differences arose the conviction that deeper and more broadly based study must be given to underlying theological questions and particularly to that of the relation between creation and redemption.

The section dealing with Scripture and tradition made the valuable emphasis that from the standpoint of the New Testament the Christian Tradition (which they emphasized with a capital *T*) is the gospel itself (compare 2 Thess. 2:15). The question immediately arises, of course, as to the

criterion by which this Tradition is to be determined. How are we to know what is truly the gospel and what is not? On this question it was impossible to find agreement, and the conference could only point out the various criteria by which different churches determine this. Out of this problem grew a recommendation for further study both of the principles by which Scripture should be interpreted and of the church fathers through whose interpretations of Scripture so much of historic Christian tradition took shape.

One year later the Faith and Order Commission met at Aarhus, Denmark, to review the results of the Montreal Conference and plan for future study. Here a series of papers was projected, to be developed by committees looking toward their presentation at the meeting of the commission in Bristol in 1967.

(Concluded next week)

## The art of living

By MIRIAM WOOD

*when you're Young*

**THE "PICKERS"** A certain type of person may be characterized as a "picker"—one who seems relentlessly determined to find tiny, insignificant flaws to "pick" at. Furrow-browed, gimlet-eyed people of this type must be, it would seem, gifted with 20/20-plus vision—otherwise, how could they possibly see every tiny imperfection in a beautiful totality?

Perhaps the topic under discussion is a vocal solo that everyone agrees was simply superb. The soloist had acquitted himself beautifully.

But wait. After a moment's hesitation (and this seems a must for stylized "picking") a tentative voice remarks, "Oh, I think the solo was *tremendous!* I've always loved to hear him sing. But—I wonder—did anyone else notice that he flatted just a *wee* bit on that very high note? Of course that's such a *little* thing—"

Indeed it is, but that's the kind of material a "picker" always selects. If the rest of the group hadn't noticed the flating, they'll wonder whether they are musically illiterate, and in the future, when the singer performs, they may even subconsciously wait for him to flat on his high note—just the *least* little bit, of course.

Food is a particularly rich field for "pickers," since there are such wide variations in taste. In the midst of delighted comments at the end of a memorable meal at a restaurant, the hesitant little voice of Miss P can be heard, each syllable dropping like a tiny rock into a

placid pool of contentment. "Oh, it really was delicious! I enjoyed everything so much. I just wish, though, that the tomatoes had been a trifle less green—but it doesn't make all that much difference, does it?"

It hadn't, up until then. The fact that some of the tender-stomached individuals may now begin to feel uncomfortable stirrings of indigestion is, I'm sure, not Miss P's fault in any way—or is it?

No area of life is exempt from "pickers." Just let a photography enthusiast bring out his latest pictures and, amid the plaudits of the group, you'll soon know if one of these mild scourges is in the room. When there's a lull, and the photographer is basking in the warm glow of appreciation, the rosy hue may darken a trifle to the accompaniment of an accomplished bit of "picking."

"I don't know *when* I've seen prettier slides. . . . You have such a flair! I was just wondering, though, would Kodachrome Super XYZ½ have given just a *little* better color? Of course, it's difficult to see how they could be improved at all!"

Well, the poor photographer suddenly feels second rate.

In plain words, then, a "picker" is a person who's so "picky" about everything that he is as irritating as a grain of sand in an oyster. He doesn't, though, produce any pearls, unless, of course, he decides to use his "picking" talent on himself.

I think the world would be a better place to live in if there were no "pickers." Doesn't everybody?